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# SIMONE de BEAUVOIR

author of
'THE SECOND SEX'

# A HISTORY OF SEX

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# A History of Sex

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A FOUR SQUARE BOOK

# A History of Sex

SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR

*Translated from the French and edited by H. M. Parshley*

FOUR

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# INTRODUCTION

FOR a long time I have hesitated to write a book on **woman.** The subject is irritating, especially to women; and it is not new. Enough ink has been spilled in quarrelling over feminism, and perhaps we should say no more about it. It is still talked about, however, for the voluminous nonsense uttered during the last century seems to have done little to illuminate the problem. After all, is there a problem? And if so, what is it? Are there women, really? Most assuredly the theory of the eternal feminine still has its adherents who will whisper in your ear: 'Even in Russia women still are *women*'; and other erudite persons—sometimes the very same—say with a sigh: 'Woman is losing her way, woman is lost.' One wonders if women still exist, if they will always exist, whether or not it is desirable that they should, what place they occupy in this world, what their place should be. 'What has become of women?' was asked recently in an ephemeral magazine.

But first we must ask: what is a woman? '*Tota mulier in utero*', says one, 'woman is a womb'. But in speaking of certain women, connoisseurs declare that they are not women, although they are equipped with a uterus like the rest. All agree in recognizing the fact that females exist in the human species; today as always they make up about one half of humanity. And yet we are told that femininity is in danger; we are exhorted to be women, remain women, become women. It would appear, then, that every female human being is not necessarily a woman; to be so considered she must share in that mysterious and threatened reality known as femininity. Is this attribute something secreted by the ovaries? Or is it a Platonic essence, a product of the philosophic imagination? Is a rustling petticoat enough to bring it down to earth? Although some women try zealously to incarnate this essence, it is hardly patentable. It is frequently described in vague and dazzling terms that seem to have been borrowed from the vocabulary of the seers, and indeed in the times of St. Thomas it was considered an essence as certainly defined as the somniferous virtue of the poppy.

But conceptualism has lost ground. The biological and social sciences no longer admit the existence of unchangeably fixed entities that determine given characteristics, such as those ascribed to woman, the Jew, or the Negro. Science regards any characteristic as a reaction dependent in part upon a *situation*. If today femininity no longer exists, then it never existed. But does the word *woman*, then, have no specific content? This is stoutly affirmed by those who hold to the philosophy of the enlightenment, of rationalism, of nominalism; women, to them, are merely the human beings arbitrarily designated by the word *woman*. Many American women particularly are prepared to think that there is no longer any place for woman as such; if a backward individual still takes herself for a woman, her friends advise her to be psychoanalysed and thus get rid of this obsession. In regard to a work, *Modern Woman: The Lost Sex*, which in other respects has its irritating features, Dorothy Parker has written: 'I cannot be just to books which treat of woman as woman . . . My idea is that all of us, men as well as women, should be regarded as human beings.' But nominalism is a rather inadequate doctrine, and the anti-feminists have had no trouble in showing that women simply *are not* men. Surely woman is, like man, a human being; but such a declaration is abstract. The fact is that every concrete human being is always a singular, separate individual. To decline to accept such notions as the eternal feminine, the black soul, the Jewish character, is not to deny that Jews, Negroes, women exist today—this denial does not represent a liberation for those concerned, but rather a flight from reality. Some years ago a well-known woman writer refused to permit her portrait to appear in a series of photographs especially devoted to women writers; she wished to be counted among the men. But in order to gain this privilege she made use of her husband's influence! Women who assert that they are men lay claim none the less to masculine consideration and respect. I recall also a young Trotskyite standing on a platform at a boisterous meeting and getting ready to use her fists, in spite of her evident fragility. She was denying her feminine weakness; but it was for love of a militant male whose equal she wished to be. The attitude of defiance of many American women proves that they are haunted by a sense of their femininity. In truth, to go for a walk with one's eyes open is enough to demonstrate that humanity is divided into two classes of individuals whose clothes, faces, bodies, smiles, gaits, interests, and occupations

are manifestly different. Perhaps these differences are superficial, perhaps they are destined to disappear. What is certain is that they do most obviously exist.

If her functioning as a female is not enough to define woman, if we decline also to explain her through 'the eternal feminine', and if nevertheless we admit, provisionally, that women do exist, then we must face the question: what is a woman?

To state the question is, to me, to suggest, at once, a preliminary answer. The fact that I ask it is in itself significant. A man would never set out to write a book on the peculiar situation of the human male. But if I wish to define myself, I must first of all say: 'I am a woman'; on this truth must be based all further discussion. A man never begins by presenting himself as an individual of a certain sex; it goes without saying that he is a man. The terms *masculine* and *feminine* are used symmetrically only as a matter of form, as on legal papers. In actuality the relation of the two sexes is not quite like that of two electrical poles, for man represents both the positive and the neutral, as is indicated by the common use of *man* to designate human beings in general; whereas woman represents only the negative, defined by limiting criteria, without reciprocity. In the midst of an abstract discussion it is vexing to hear a man say: 'You think thus and so because you are a woman'; but I know that my only defence is to reply: 'I think thus and so because it is true,' thereby removing my subjective self from the argument. It would be out of the question to reply: 'And you think the contrary because you are a man', for it is understood that the fact of being a man is no peculiarity. A man is in the right in being a man; it is the woman who is in the wrong. It amounts to this: just as for the ancients there was an absolute vertical with reference to which the oblique was defined, so there is an absolute human type, the masculine. Woman has ovaries, a uterus; these peculiarities imprison her in her subjectivity, circumscribe her within the limits of her own nature. It is often said that she thinks with her glands. Man superbly ignores the fact that his anatomy also includes glands, such as the testicles, and that they secrete hormones. He thinks of his body as a direct and normal connection with the world, which he believes he apprehends objectively, whereas he regards the body of woman as a hindrance, a prison, weighed down by everything peculiar to it. 'The female is a female by virtue of a certain *lack* of qualities,' said Aristotle; 'we should regard

the female nature as afflicted with a natural defectiveness.' And St. Thomas for his part pronounced woman to be an 'imperfect man', an 'incidental' being. This is symbolized in Genesis where Eve is depicted as made from what Bossuet called 'a supernumerary bone' of Adam.

Thus humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being. Michelet writes: 'Women, the relative being ...' And Benda is most positive in his *Rapport d'Uriel*: 'the body of man makes sense in itself quite apart from that of woman, whereas the latter seems wanting in significance by itself ... Man can think of himself without woman. She cannot think of herself without man.' And she is simply what man decrees; thus she is called 'the sex', by which is meant that she appears essentially to the male as a sexual being. For him she is sex—absolute sex, no less. She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute—she is the Other.[1]

The category of the *Other* is as primordial as consciousness itself. In the most primitive societies, in the most ancient mythologies, one finds the expression of a duality—that of the Self and the Other. This duality was not originally attached to the division of the sexes; it was not dependent upon any empirical fact. It is revealed in such words as that of Granet on Chinese thought and those of Dumézil on the East Indies and Rome. The feminine element was at first no more

[1] E. Lévinas expresses this idea most explicitly in his essay *Temps et l'Autre*. 'Is there not a case in which otherness, alterity [*altérité*], unquestionably marks the nature of a being, as its essence, an instance of otherness not consisting purely and simply in the opposition of two species of the same genus? I think that the feminine represents the contrary in its absolute sense, this contrariness being in no wise affected by any relation between it and its correlative and thus remaining absolutely other. Sex is not a certain specific difference ... no more is the sexual difference a mere contradiction ... Nor does this difference lie in the duality of two complementary terms, for two complementary terms imply a pre-existing whole ... Otherness reaches its full flowering in the feminine, a term of the same rank as consciousness but of opposite meaning.'

I suppose that Lévinas does not forget that woman, too, is aware of her own consciousness, or ego. But it is striking that he deliberately takes a man's point of view, disregarding the reciprocity of subject and object. When he writes that woman is mystery, he implies that she is mystery for man. Thus his description, which is intended to be objective, is in fact an assertion of masculine privilege.

involved in such pairs as Varuna-Mitra, Uranus-Zeus, Sun-Moon, and Day-Night than it was in the contrasts between Good and Evil, lucky and unlucky auspices, right and left, God and Lucifer. Otherness is a fundamental category of human thought.

Thus it is that no group ever sets itself up as the One without at once setting up the Other over against itself. If three travellers chance to occupy the same compartment, that is enough to make vaguely hostile 'others' out of all the rest of the passengers on the train. In small-town eyes all persons not belonging to the village are 'strangers' and suspect; to the native of a country all who inhabit other countries are 'foreigners'; Jews are 'different' for the anti-Semite, Negroes are 'inferior' for American racists, aborigines are 'natives' for colonists, proletarians are the 'lower class' for the privileged.

Lévi-Strauss, at the end of a profound work on the various forms of primitive societies, reaches the following conclusion: 'Passage from the state of Nature to the state of Culture is marked by man's ability to view biological relations as a series of contrasts; duality, alternation, opposition, and symmetry, whether under definite or vague forms, constitute not so much phenomena to be explained as fundamental and immediately given data of social reality.'[1] These phenomena would be incomprehensible if in fact human society were simply a *Mitsein* or fellowship based on solidarity and friendliness. Things become clear, on the contrary, if, following Hegel, we find in consciousness itself a fundamental hostility towards every other consciousness; the subject can be posed only in being opposed—he sets himself up as the essential, as opposed to the other, the inessential, the object.

But the other consciousness, the other ego, sets up a reciprocal claim. The native travelling abroad is shocked to find himself in turn regarded as a 'stranger' by the natives of neighbouring countries. As a matter of fact, wars, festivals, trading, treaties, and contests among tribes, nations, and classes tend to deprive the concept *Other* of its absolute sense and to make manifest its relativity; willy-nilly, individuals and groups are forced to realize the reciprocity of their relations. How is it, then, that this reciprocity has not been recognized between the sexes, that one of the contrasting terms is set up as the sole essential, denying any relativity in regard to its correlative and defining the latter as pure otherness? Why is

[1] See C. LEVI-STRAUSS, *Les Structures élémentaires de parenté.*

it that women do not dispute male sovereignty? No subject will readily volunteer to become the object, the inessential; it is not the Other who, in defining himself as the Other, establishes the One. The Other is posed as such by the One in defining himself as the One. But if the Other is not to regain the status of being the One, he must be submissive enough to accept this alien point of view. Whence comes this submission in the case of woman?

There are, to be sure, other cases in which a certain category has been able to dominate another completely for a time. Very often this privilege depends upon inequality of numbers—the majority imposes its rule upon the minority or persecutes it. But women are not a minority, like the American Negroes or the Jews; there are as many women as men on earth. Again, the two groups concerned have often been originally independent; they may have been formerly unaware of each other's existence, or perhaps they recognized each other's autonomy. But a historical event has resulted in the subjugation of the weaker by the stronger. The scattering of the Jews, the introduction of slavery into America, the conquests of imperialism are examples in point. In these cases the oppressed retained at least the memory of former days; they possessed in common a past, a tradition, sometimes a religion or a culture.

The parallel drawn by Bebel between women and the proletariat is valid in that neither ever formed a minority or a separate collective unit of mankind. And instead of a single historical event it is in both cases a historical development that explains their status as a class and accounts for the membership of *particular individuals* in that class. But proletarians have not always existed, whereas there have always been women. They are women in virtue of their anatomy and physiology. Throughout history they have always been subordinated to men,[1] and hence their dependency is not the result of a historical event or a social change—it was not something that *occurred*. The reason why otherness in this case seems to be an absolute is in part that it lacks the contingent or incidental nature of historical facts. A condition brought about at a certain time can be abolished at some other time, as the Negroes of Haiti and others have proved; but it might seem that a natural condition is beyond the possibility of change. In truth, however, the nature of things is no more

[1] With rare exceptions, perhaps, like certain matriarchal rulers, queens, and the like.—TR.

immutably given, once for all, than is historical reality. If woman seems to be the inessential which never becomes the essential, it is because she herself fails to bring about this change. Proletarians say 'We' ; Negroes also. Regarding themselves as subjects, they transform the bourgeois, the whites, into 'others'. But women do not say 'We', except at some congress of feminists or similar formal demonstration ; men say 'women', and women use the same word in referring to themselves. They do not authentically assume a subjective attitude. The proletarians have accomplished the revolution in Russia, the Negroes in Haiti, the Indo-Chinese are battling for it in Indo-China ; but the women's effort has never been anything more than a symbolic agitation. They have gained only what men have been willing to grant ; they have taken nothing, they have only received.[1]

The reason for this is that women lack concrete means for organizing themselves into a unit which can stand face to face with the correlative unit. They have no past, no history, no religion of their own ; and they have no such solidarity, no work and interest as that of the proletariat. They are not even promiscuously herded together in the way that creates community feeling among the American Negroes, the ghetto Jews, the workers of Saint-Denis, or the factory hands of Renault. They live dispersed among the males, attached through residence, housework, economic condition, and social standing to certain men—fathers or husbands—more firmly than they are to other women. If they belong to the bourgeoisie, they feel solidarity with men of that class, not with proletarian women ; if they are white, their allegiance is to white men, not to Negro women. The proletariat can propose to massacre the ruling class, and a sufficiently fanatical Jew or Negro might dream of getting sole possession of the atomic bomb and making humanity wholly Jewish or black ; but woman cannot even dream of exterminating the males. The bond that unites her to her oppressors is not comparable to any other. The division of the sexes is a biological fact, not an event in human history. Male and female stand opposed within a primordial *Mitsein*, and woman has not broken it. The couple is a fundamental unity with its two halves riveted together, and the cleavage of society along the line of sex is impossible. Here is to be found the basic trait of woman: she is the Other in a totality of which the two components are necessary to one another.

[1] See Part II, chap. v.

One could suppose that this reciprocity might have facilitated the liberation of woman. When Hercules sat at the feet of Omphale and helped with her spinning, his desire for her held him captive; but why did she fail to gain a lasting power? To revenge herself on Jason, Medea killed their children; and this grim legend would seem to suggest that she might have obtained a formidable influence over him through his love for his offspring. In *Lysistrata* Aristophanes gaily depicts a band of women who joined forces to gain social ends through the sexual needs of their men; but this is only a play. In the legend of the Sabine women, the latter soon abandoned their plan of remaining sterile to punish their ravishers. In truth woman has not been socially emancipated through man's need—sexual desire and the desire for offspring—which makes the male dependent for satisfaction upon the female.

Master and slave, also, are united by a reciprocal need, in this case economic, which does not liberate the slave. In the relation of master to slave the master does not make a point of the need that he has for the other; he has in his grips the power of satisfying this need through his own action; whereas the slave, in his dependent condition, his hope and fear, is quite conscious of the need he has for his master. Even if the need is at bottom equally urgent for both, it always works in favour of the oppressor and against the oppressed. That is why the liberation of the working class, for example, has been slow.

Now, woman has always been man's dependent, if not his slave; the two sexes have never shared the world in equality. And even today woman is heavily handicapped, though her situation is beginning to change. Almost nowhere is her legal status the same as man's, and frequently it is much to her disadavantage. Even when her rights are legally recognized in the abstract, long-standing custom prevents their full expression in the mores. In the economic sphere men and women can almost be said to make up two castes; other things being equal, the former hold the better jobs, get higher wages, and have more opportunity for success than their new competitors. In industry and politics men have a great many more positions and they monopolize the most important posts. In addition to all this, they enjoy a traditional prestige that the education of children tends in every way to support, for the present enshrines the past—and in the past all history has been made by men. At the

present time, when women are beginning to take part in the affairs of the world, it is still a world that belongs to men—they have no doubt of it at all and women have scarcely any. To decline to be the Other, to refuse to be a party to the deal—this would be for women to renounce all the advantages conferred upon them by their alliance with the superior caste. Man-the-sovereign will provide woman-the-liege with material protection and will undertake the moral justification of her existence; thus she can evade at once both economic risk and the metaphysical risk of a liberty in which ends and aims must be contrived without assistance. Indeed, along with the ethical urge of each individual to affirm his subjective existence, there is also the temptation to forgo liberty and become a thing. This is an inauspicious road, for he who takes it—passive, lost, ruined—becomes henceforth the creature of another's will, frustrated in his transcendence and deprived of every value. But it is an easy road; on it one avoids the strain involved in undertaking an authentic existence. When man makes of woman the *Other*, he may, then, expect her to manifest deep-seated tendencies towards complicity. Thus, woman may fail to lay claim to the status of subject because she lacks definite resources, because she feels the necessary bond that ties her to man regardless of reciprocity, and because she is often very well pleased with her role as the *Other*.

But it will be asked at once: how did all this begin? It is easy to see that the duality of the sexes, like any duality, gives rise to conflict. And doubtless the winner will assume the status of absolute. But why should man have won from the start? It seems possible that women could have won the victory; or that the outcome of the conflict might never have been decided. How is it that this world has always belonged to the men and that things have begun to change only recently? Is this change a good thing? Will it bring about an equal sharing of the world between men and women?

These questions are not new, and they have often been answered. But the very fact that woman *is the Other* tends to cast suspicion upon all the justification that men have ever been able to provide for it. These have all too evidently been dictated by men's interest. A little-known feminist of the seventeenth century, Poulain de la Barre, put it this way: 'All that has been written about women by men should be suspect, for the men are at once judge and party to the

lawsuit.' Everywhere, at all times, the males have displayed their satisfaction in feeling that they are the lords of creation. 'Blessed be God . . . that He did not make me a woman,' say the Jews in their morning prayers, while their wives pray on a note of resignation: 'Blessed be the Lord, who created me according to His will.' The first among the blessings for which Plato thanked the gods was that he had been created free, not enslaved; the second, a man, not a woman. But the males could not enjoy this privilege fully unless they believed it to be founded on the absolute and the eternal; they sought to make the fact of their supremacy into a right. 'Being men, those who have made and compiled the laws have favoured their own sex, and jurists have elevated these laws into principles', to quote Poulain de la Barre once more.

Legislators, priests, philosophers, writers, and scientists have striven to show that the subordinate position of woman is willed in heaven and advantageous on earth. The religions invented by men reflect this wish for domination. In the legends of Eve and Pandora men have taken up arms against women. They have made use of philosophy and theology, as the quotations from Aristotle and St. Thomas have shown. Since ancient times satirists and moralists have delighted in showing up the weaknesses of women. We are familiar with the savage indictment hurled against women throughout French literature. Montherlant, for example, follows the tradition of Jean de Meung, though with less gusto. This hostility may at times be well founded, often it is gratuitous; but in truth it more or less successfully conceals a desire for self-justification. As Montaigne says, 'It is easier to accuse one sex than to excuse the other'. Sometimes what is going on is clear enough. For instance, the Roman law limiting the rights of woman cited 'the imbecility, the instability of the sex' just when the weakening of family ties seemed to threaten the interests of male heirs. And in the effort to keep the married woman under guardianship, appeal was made in the sixteenth century to the authority of St. Augustine, who declared that 'woman is a creature neither decisive nor constant', at a time when the single woman was thought capable of managing her property. Montaigne understood clearly how arbitrary and unjust was woman's appointed lot: 'Women are not in the wrong when they decline to accept the rules laid down for them, since the men make these rules without consulting them. No wonder

intrigue and strife abound.' But he did not go so far as to champion their cause.

It was only later, in the eighteenth century, that genuinely democratic men began to view the matter objectively. Diderot, among others, strove to show that woman is, like man, a human being. Later John Stuart Mill came fervently to her defence. But these philosophers displayed unusual impartiality. In the nineteenth century the feminist quarrel became again a quarrel of partisans. One of the consequences of the industrial revolution was the entrance of women into productive labour, and it was just here that the claims of the feminists emerged from the realm of theory and acquired an economic basis, while their opponents became the more aggressive. Although landed property lost power to some extent, the bourgeoisie clung to the old morality that found the guarantee of private property in the solidity of the family. Woman was ordered back into the home the more harshly as her emancipation became a real menace. Even within the working class the men endeavoured to restrain woman's liberation, because they began to see the women as dangerous competitors—the more so because they were accustomed to work for lower wages.[1]

In proving woman's inferiority, the anti-feminists then began to draw not only upon religion, philosophy, and theology, as before, but also upon science—biology, experimental psychology, etc. At most they were willing to grant 'equality in difference' to the *other* sex. That profitable formula is most significant; it is precisely like the 'equal but separate' formula of the Jim Crow laws aimed at the North American Negroes. As is well known, this so-called equalitarian segregation has resulted only in the most extreme discrimination. The similarity just noted is in no way due to chance, for whether it is a race, a caste, a class, or a sex that is reduced to a position of inferiority, the methods of justification are the same. 'The eternal feminine' corresponds to 'the black soul' and to 'the Jewish character'. True, the Jewish problem is on the whole very different from the other two—to the anti-Semite the Jew is not so much an inferior as he is an enemy for whom there is to be granted no place on earth, for whom annihilation is the fate desired. But there are deep similarities between the situation of woman and that of the Negro. Both are emancipated today from a like paternalism, and the former master class wishes

[1] See Part II, pp. 136-8.

to 'keep them in their place'—that is, the place chosen for them. In both cases the former masters lavish more or less sincere eulogies, either on the virtues of 'the good Negro' with his dormant, childish, merry soul—the submissive Negro—or on the merits of the woman who is 'truly feminine'—that is, frivolous, infantile, irresponsible—the submissive woman. In both cases the dominant class bases its argument on a state of affairs that it has itself created. As George Bernard Shaw puts it, in substance, 'The American white relegates the black to the rank of shoeshine boy; and he concludes from this that the black is good for nothing but shining shoes.' This vicious circle is met with in all analogous circumstances; when an individual (or a group of individuals) is kept in a situation of inferiority, the fact is that he *is* inferior. But the significance of the verb *to be* must be rightly understood here; it is in bad faith to give it a static value when it really has the dynamic Hegelian sense of 'to have become'. Yes, women on the whole *are* today inferior to men; that is, their situation affords them fewer possibilities. The question is: should that state of affairs continue?

Many men hope that it will continue; not all have given up the battle. The conservative bourgeoisie still see in the emancipation of women a menace to their morality and their interests. Some men dread feminine competition. Recently a male student wrote in the *Hebdo-Latin*: 'Every woman student who goes into medicine or law robs us of a job.' He never questioned his rights in this world. And economic interests are not the only ones concerned. One of the benefits that oppression confers upon the oppressors is that the most humble among them is made to *feel* superior; thus, a 'poor white' in the South can console himself with the thought that he is not a 'dirty nigger'—and the more prosperous whites cleverly exploit this pride.

Similarly, the most mediocre of males feels himself a demi-god as compared with women. It was much easier for M. de Montherlant to think himself a hero when he faced women (and women chosen for his purpose) than when he was obliged to act the man among men—something many women have done better than he, for that matter. And in September 1948, in one of his articles in the *Figaro littéraire*, Claude Mauriac—whose great originality is admired by all—could[1] write regarding woman: '*We* listen on a tone [*sic!*] of polite

[1] Or at least he thought he could.

indifference . . . to the most brilliant among them, well knowing that her wit reflects more or less luminously ideas that come from *us*.' Evidently the speaker referred to is not reflecting the ideas of Mauriac himself, for no one knows of his having any. It may be that she reflects ideas originating with men, but then, even among men there are those who have been known to appropriate ideas not their own; and one can well ask whether Claude Mauriac might not find more interesting a conversation reflecting Descartes, Marx, or Gide rather than himself. What is really remarkable is that by using the questionable *we* he identifies himself with St. Paul, Hegel, Lenin, and Nietzsche, and from the lofty eminence of their grandeur looks disdainfully upon the bevy of women who make bold to converse with him on a footing of equality. In truth, I know of more than one woman who would refuse to suffer with patience Mauriac's 'tone of polite indifference.'

I have lingered on this example because the masculine attitude is here displayed with disarming ingenuousness. But men profit in more subtle ways from the otherness, the alterity of woman. Here is miraculous balm for those afflicted with an inferiority complex, and indeed no one is more arrogant towards women, more aggressive or scornful, than the man who is anxious about his virility. Those who are not fear-ridden in the presence of their fellow men are much more disposed to recognize a fellow creature in woman; but even to these the myth of Woman, the Other, is precious for many reasons.[1] They cannot be blamed for not cheerfully relinquishing all the benefits they derive from the myth, for they realize what they would lose in relinquishing woman as they fancy her to be, while they fail to realize what they have to gain from the woman of tomorrow. Refusal to pose oneself as the Subject, unique and absolute, requires great self-denial. Furthermore, the vast majority of men make no such claim explicitly. They do not *postulate* woman as inferior, for today they are too thoroughly imbued with the

[1] A significant article on this theme by Michel Carrouges appears in No. 292 of the *Cahiers du Sud*. He writes indignantly: 'Would that there were no woman-myth at all but only a cohort of cooks, matrons, prostitutes, and bluestockings serving functions of pleasure or usefulness!' That is to say, in his view woman has no existence in and for herself; he thinks only of her *function* in the male world. Her reason for existence lies in man. But then, in fact, her poetic 'function' as a myth might be more valued than any other. The real problem is precisely to find out why woman should be defined with relation to man.

ideal of democracy not to recognize all human beings as equals.

In the bosom of the family, woman seems in the eyes of childhood and youth to be clothed in the same social dignity as the adult males. Later on, the young man, desiring and loving, experiences the resistance, the independence of the woman desired and loved; in marriage, he respects woman as wife and mother, and in the concrete events of conjugal life she stands there before him as a free being. He can therefore feel that social subordination as between the sexes no longer exists and that on the whole, in spite of differences, woman is an equal. As, however, he observes some points of inferiority—the most important being unfitness for the professions—he attributes these to natural causes. When he is in a co-operative and benevolent relation with woman, his theme is the principle of abstract equality, and he does not base his attitude upon such inequality as may exist. But when he is in conflict with her, the situation is reversed: his theme will be the existing inequality, and he will even take it as justification for denying abstract equality.

So it is that many men will affirm as if in good faith that women *are* the equals of man and that they have nothing to clamour for, while *at the same time* they will say that women can never be the equals of man and that their demands are in vain. It is, in point of fact, a difficult matter for man to realize the extreme importance of social discriminations which seem outwardly insignificant but which produce in woman moral and intellectual effects so profound that they appear to spring from her original nature.[1] The most sympathetic of men never fully comprehend woman's concrete situation. And there is no reason to put much trust in the men when they rush to the defence of privileges whose full extent they can hardly measure. We shall not, then, permit ourselves to be intimidated by the number and violence of the attacks launched against women, nor to be entrapped by the self-seeking eulogies bestowed on the 'true woman', nor to profit by the enthusiasm for woman's destiny manifested by men who would not for the world have any part of it.

We should consider the arguments of the feminists with no less suspicion, however, for very often their controversial aim deprives them of all real value. If the 'woman question'

[1] The specific purpose of Book Two of this study is to describe this process.

seems trivial, it is because masculine arrogance has made of it a 'quarrel'; and when quarrelling one no longer reasons well. People have tirelessly sought to prove that woman is superior, inferior, or equal to man. Some say that, having been created after Adam, she is evidently a secondary being; others say on the contrary that Adam was only a rough draft and that God succeeded in producing the human being in perfection when He created Eve. Woman's brain is smaller; yes, but it is relatively larger. Christ was made a man; yes, but perhaps for his greater humility. Each argument at once suggests its opposite, and both are often fallacious. If we are to gain understanding, we must get out of these ruts; we must discard the vague notions of superiority, inferiority, equality which have hitherto corrupted every discussion of the subject and start afresh.

Very well, but just how shall we pose the question? And, to begin with, who are we to propound it at all? Man is at once judge and party to the case; but so is woman. What we need is an angel—neither man nor woman—but where shall we find one? Still, the angel would be poorly qualified to speak, for an angel is ignorant of all the basic facts involved in the problem. With a hermaphrodite we should be no better off, for here the situation is most peculiar; the hermaphrodite is not really the combination of a whole man and a whole woman, but consists of parts of each and thus is neither. It looks to me as if there are, after all, certain women who are best qualified to elucidate the situation of woman. Let us not be misled by the sophism that because Epimenides was a Cretan he was necessarily a liar; it is not a mysterious essence that compels men and women to act in good or in bad faith, it is their situation that inclines them more or less towards the search for truth. Many of today's women, fortunate in the restoration of all the privileges pertaining to the estate of the human being, can afford the luxury of impartiality—we even recognize its necessity. We are no longer like our partisan elders; by and large we have won the game. In recent debates on the status of women the United Nations has persistently maintained that the equality of the sexes is now becoming a reality, and already some of us have never had to sense in our femininity an inconvenience or an obstacle. Many problems appear to us to be more pressing than those which concern us in particular, and this detachment even allows us to hope that our attitude will be objective. Still, we know the feminine

world more intimately than do the men because we have our roots in it, we grasp more immediately than do men what it means to a human being to be feminine; and we are more concerned with such knowledge. I have said that there are more pressing problems, but this does not prevent us from seeing some importance in asking how the fact of being women will affect our lives. What opportunities precisely have been given us and what withheld? What fate awaits our younger sisters, and what directions should they take? It is significant that books by women on women are in general animated in our day less by a wish to demand our rights than by an effort towards clarity and understanding. As we emerge from an era of excessive controversy, this book is offered as one attempt among others to confirm that statement.

But it is doubtless impossible to approach any human problems with a mind free from bias. The way in which questions are put, the points of view assumed, presuppose a relativity of interest; all characteristics imply values, and every objective description, so called, implies an ethical background. Rather than attempt to conceal principles more or less definitely implied, it is better to state them openly, at the beginning. This will make it unnecessary to specify on every page in just what sense one uses such words as *superior*, *inferior*, *better*, *worse*, *progress*, *reaction*, and the like. If we survey some of the works on woman, we note that one of the points of view most frequently adopted is that of the public good, the general interest; and one always means by this the benefit of society as one wishes it to be maintained or established. For our part, we hold that the only public good is that which assures the private good of the citizens; we shall pass judgment on institutions according to their effectiveness in giving concrete opportunities to individuals. But we do not confuse the idea of private interest with that of happiness, although that is another common point of view. Are not women of the harem more happy than women voters? Is not the housekeeper happier than the working-woman? It is not too clear just what the word *happy* really means and still less what true values it may mask. There is no possibility of measuring the happiness of others, and it is always easy to describe as happy the situation in which one wishes to place them.

In particular those who are condemned to stagnation are often pronounced happy on the pretext that happiness con-

sists in being at rest. This notion we reject, for our perspective is that of existentialist ethics. Every subject plays his part as such specifically through exploits or projects that serve as a mode of transcendence; he achieves liberty only through a continual reaching out towards other liberties. There is no justification for present existence other than its expansion into an indefinitely open future. Every time transcendence falls back into immanence, stagnation, there is degradation of existence into the '*en-soi*'—the brutish life of subjection to given conditions—and of liberty into constraint and contingence. This downfall represents a moral fault if the subject consents to it; if it is inflicted upon him, it spells frustration and oppression. In both cases it is an absolute evil. Every individual concerned to justify his existence feels that his existence involves an undefined need to transcend himself, to engage in freely chosen projects.

Now, what peculiarly signalizes the situation of woman is that she—a free and autonomous being like all human creatures—nevertheless finds herself living in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the Other. They propose to stabilize her as object and to doom her to immanence since her transcendance is to be overshadowed and for ever transcended by another ego (*conscience*) which is essential and sovereign. The drama of woman lies in this conflict between the fundamental aspirations of every subject (ego)—who always regards the self as the essential—and the compulsions of a situation in which she is the inessential. How can a human being in woman's situation attain fulfilment? What roads are open to her? Which are blocked? How can independence be recovered in a state of dependency? What circumstances limit woman's liberty and how can they be overcome? These are the fundamental questions on which I would fain throw some light. This means that I am interested in the fortunes of the individual as defined not in terms of happiness but in terms of liberty.

Quite evidently this problem would be without significance if we were to believe that woman's destiny is inevitably determined by physiological, psychological, or economic forces. Hence I shall discuss first of all the light in which woman is viewed by biology, psychoanalysis, and historical materialism. Next I shall try to show exactly how the concept of the 'truly feminine' has been fashioned—why woman has been defined as the Other—and what have been the consequences from man's point of view. Then from woman's

point of view I shall describe the world in which women must live; and thus we shall be able to envisage the difficulties in their way as, endeavouring to make their escape from the sphere hitherto assigned them, they aspire to full membership in the human race.

# PART I

# DESTINY

CHAPTER I

# THE DATA OF BIOLOGY

WOMAN? Very simple, say the fanciers of simple formulas: she is a womb, an ovary; she is a female—this word is sufficient to define her. In the mouth of a man the epithet *female* has the sound of an insult, yet he is not ashamed of his animal nature; on the contrary, he is proud if someone says of him: 'He is a male!' The term 'female' is derogatory not because it emphasizes woman's animality, but because it imprisons her in her sex; and if this sex seems to man to be contemptible and inimical even in harmless dumb animals, it is evidently because of the uneasy hostility stirred up in him by woman. Nevertheless he wishes to find in biology a justification for this sentiment. The word *female* brings up in his mind a saraband of imagery—a vast, round ovum engulfs and castrates the agile spermatozoon; the monstrous and swollen termite queen rules over the enslaved males; the female praying mantis and the spider, satiated with love, crush and devour their partners; the bitch in heat runs through the alleys, trailing behind her a wake of depraved odours; the she-monkey presents her posterior immodestly and then steals away with hypocritical coquetry; and the most superb wild beasts—the tigress, the lioness, the panther—bed down slavishly under the imperial embrace of the male. Females sluggish, eager, artful, stupid, callous, lustful, ferocious, abased—man projects them all at once upon woman. And the fact is that she is a female. But if we are willing to stop thinking in platitudes, two questions are immediately posed: what does the female denote in the animal kingdom? And what particular kind of female is manifest in woman?

Males and females are two types of individuals which are differentiated within a species for the function of reproduction; they can be defined only correlatively. But first

it must be noted that even the *division* of a species into two sexes is not always clear-cut.

In nature it is not universally manifested. To speak only of animals, it is well known that among the microscopic one-celled forms—infusoria, amoebae, sporozoans, and the like—multiplication is fundamentally distinct from sexuality. Each cell divides and subdivides by itself. In many-celled animals or metazoans reproduction may take place asexually, either by schizogenesis—that is, by fission or cutting into two or more parts which become new individuals—or by blastogenesis—that is, by buds that separate and form new individuals. The phenomena of budding observed in the fresh-water hydra and other coelenterates, in sponges, worms, and tunicates, are well-known examples. In cases of parthenogenesis the egg of the virgin female develops into an embryo without fertilization by the male, which thus may play no role at all. In the honey-bee copulation takes place, but the eggs may or may not be fertilized at the time of laying. The unfertilized eggs undergo development and produce the drones (males); in the aphids males are absent during a series of generations in which the eggs are unfertilized and produce females. Parthenogenesis has been induced artificially in the sea urchin, the starfish, the frog, and other species. Among the one-celled animals (Protozoa), however, two cells may fuse, forming what is called a zygote; and in the honey-bee fertilization is necessary if the eggs are to produce females. In the aphids both males and females appear in the autumn, and the fertilized eggs then produced are adapted for overwintering.

Certain biologists in the past concluded from these facts that even in species capable of asexual propagation occasional fertilization is necessary to renew the vigour of the race—to accomplish 'rejuvenation'—through the mixing of hereditary material from two individuals. On this hypothesis sexuality might well appear to be an indispensable function in the most complex forms of life; only the lower organisms could multiply without sexuality; and even here vitality would after a time become exhausted. But today this hypothesis is largely abandoned; research has proved that under suitable conditions asexual multiplication can go on indefinitely without noticeable degeneration, a fact that is especially striking in the bacteria and Protozoa. More and more numerous and daring experiments in parthenogenesis are being performed, and in many species the male appears to be funda-

mentally unnecessary. Besides, if the value of intercellular exchange were demonstrated, that value would seem to stand as a sheer, unexplained fact. Biology certainly demonstrates the existence of sexual differentiation, but from the point of view of any end to be attained the science could not infer such differentiation from the structure of the cell, nor from the laws of cellular multiplication, nor from any basic phenomenon.[1]

The production of two types of gametes, the sperm and the egg, does not necessarily imply the existence of two distinct sexes; as a matter of fact, egg and sperm—two highly differentiated types of reproductive cells—may both be produced by the same individual. This occurs in normally hermaphroditic species, which are common among plants and are also to be found among the lower animals, such as annelid worms and molluscs. In them reproduction may be accomplished through self-fertilization or, more commonly, cross-fertilization. Here again certain biologists have attempted to account for the existing state of affairs. Some hold that the separation of the gonads (ovaries and testes) in two distinct individuals represent an evolutionary advance over hermaphroditism; others on the contrary regard the separate condition as primitive, and believe that hermaphroditism represents a degenerate state. These notions regarding the superiority of one system or the other imply the most debatable evolutionary theorizing. All that we can say for sure is that these two modes of reproduction coexist in nature, that they both succeed in accomplishing the survival of the species concerned, and that the differentiation of the gametes, like that of the organisms producing them, appears to be accidental. It would seem, then, that the division of a species into male and female individuals is simply an irreducible fact of observation.

In most philosophies this fact has been taken for granted without pretence of explanation. According to the Platonic myth, there were at the beginning men, women, and hermaphrodites. Each individual had two faces, four arms, four legs, and two conjoined bodies. At a certain time they were split in two, and ever since each half seeks to rejoin its

[1] In modern evolutionary theory, however, the mixing of hereditary factors (genes) brought about by sexual reproduction is considered highly important since it affords a constant supply of new combinations for natural selection to act upon. And sexual differentiation often plays an important part in sexual reproduction.—Tr.

corresponding half. Later the gods decreed that new human beings should be created through the coupling of dissimilar halves. But it is only love that this story is intended to explain ; division into sexes is assumed at the outset. Nor does Aristotle explain this division, for if matter and form must co-operate in all action, there is no necessity for the active and passive principles to be separated in two different categories of individuals. Thus St. Thomas proclaims woman an 'incidental' being, which is a way of suggesting—from the male point of view—the accidental or contingent nature of sexuality. Hegel, however, would have been untrue to his passion for rationalism had he failed to attempt a logical explanation. Sexuality in his view represents the medium through which the subject attains a concrete sense of belonging to a particular kind (*genre*). 'The sense of kind is produced in the subject as an effect which offsets this disproportionate sense of his individual reality, as a desire to find the sense of himself in another individual of his species through union with this other, to complete himself and thus to incorporate the kind (*genre*) within his own nature and bring it into existence. This is copulation' (*Philosophy of Nature*, Part 3, Section 369). And a little farther on: 'The process consists in this, namely: that which they are in themselves, that is to say a single kind, one and the same subjective life, they also establish it as such.' And Hegel states later that for the uniting process to be accomplished, there must first be sexual differentiation. But his exposition is not convincing: one feels in it all too distinctly the predetermination to find in every operation the three terms of the syllogism.

The projection or transcendence of the individual towards the species, in which both individual and species are fulfilled, could be accomplished without the intervention of a third element in the simple relation of progenitor to offspring ; that is to say, reproduction could be asexual. Or, if there were to be two progenitors, they could be similar (as happens in hermaphroditic species) and differentiated only as particular individuals of a single type. Hegel's discussion reveals a most important significance of sexuality, but his mistake is always to argue from significance to necessity, to equate significance with necessity. Man gives significance to the sexes and their relations through sexual activity, just as he gives sense and value to all the functions that he exercises ; but sexual activity is not necessarily im-

plied in the nature of the human being. Merleau-Ponty notes in the *Phénoménologie de la perception* that human existence requires us to revise our ideas of necessity and contingence. 'Existence,' he says, 'has no casual, fortuitous qualities, no content that does not contribute to the formation of its aspect; it does not admit the notion of sheer fact, for it is only through existence that the facts are manifested.' True enough. But it is also true that there are conditions without which the very fact of existence itself would seem to be impossible. To be present in the world implies strictly that there exists a body which is at once a material thing in the world and a point of view towards this world; but nothing requires that this body have this or that particular structure. Sartre discusses in *L'Etre et le néant* Heidegger's dictum to the effect that the real nature of man is bound up with death because of man's finite state. He shows that an existence which is finite and yet unlimited in time is conceivable; but none the less if death were not resident in human life, the relation of man to the world and to himself would be profoundly disarranged—so much so that the statement 'Man is mortal' would be seen to have significance quite other than that of a mere fact of observation. Were he immortal, an existent would no longer be what we call a man. One of the essential features of his career is that the progress of his life through time creates behind him and before him the infinite past and future, and it would seem, then, that the perpetuation of the species is the correlative of his individual limitation. Thus we can regard the phenomenon of reproduction as founded in the very nature of being. But we must stop there. The perpetuation of the species does not necessitate sexual differentiation. True enough, this differentiation is characteristic of existents to such an extent that it belongs in any realistic definition of existence. But it nevertheless remains true that both a mind without a body and an immortal man are strictly inconceivable, whereas we can imagine a parthenogenetic or hermaphroditic society.

On the respective functions of the two sexes man has entertained a great variety of beliefs. At first they had no scientific basis, simply reflecting social myths. It was long thought—and it is still believed in certain primitive matriarchal societies—that the father plays no part in conception. Ancestral spirits in the form of living germs are supposed to find their way into the maternal body. With the advent

of patriarchal institutions, the male laid eager claim to his posterity. It was still necessary to grant the mother a part in procreation, but it was conceded only that she carried and nourished the living seed, created by the father alone. Aristotle fancied that the fetus arose from the union of sperm and menstrual blood, woman furnishing only passive matter while the male principle contributed force, activity, movement, life. Hippocrates held to a similar doctrine, recognizing two kinds of seed, the weak or female and the strong or male. The theory of Aristotle survived through the Middle Ages and into modern times.

At the end of the seventeenth century Harvey killed female dogs shortly after copulation and found in the horns of the uterus small sacs that he thought were eggs but that were really embryos. The Danish anatomist Steno gave the name of ovaries to the female genital glands, previously called 'feminine testicles', and noted on their surface the small swellings that von Graaf in 1677 erroneously identified with the eggs and that are now called Graafian follicles. The ovary was still regarded as homologous to the male gland. In the same year, however, the 'spermatic animalcules' were discovered and it was proved that they penetrated into the uterus of the female; but it was supposed that they were simply nourished therein and that the coming individual was preformed in them. In 1694 a Dutchman, Hartsaker, drew a picture of the 'homunculus' hidden in the spermatozoon, and in 1699, another scientist said that he had seen the spermatozoon cast off a kind of moult under which appeared a little man, which he also drew. Under these imaginative hypotheses, woman was restricted to the nourishment of an active, living principle already preformed in perfection. These notions were not universally accepted, and they were argued into the nineteenth century. The use of the microscope enabled von Baer in 1827 to discover the mammalian egg, contained inside the Graafian follicle. Before long it was possible to study the cleavage of the egg—that is, the early stage of development through cell division—and in 1835 sarcode, later called protoplasm, was discovered and the true nature of the cell began to be realized. In 1879 the penetration of the spermatozoon into the starfish egg was observed, and thereupon the equivalence of the nuclei of the two gametes, egg and sperm, was established. The details of their union within the fertilized egg were first worked out in 1883 by a Belgian zoologist, van Beneden.

Aristotle's ideas were not wholly discredited, however. Hegel held that the two sexes were of necessity different, the one active and the other passive, and of course the female would be the passive one. 'Thus man, in consequence of that differentiation, is the active principle while woman is the passive principle because she remains undeveloped in her unity.'[1] And even after the egg had been recognized as an active principle, men still tried to make a point of its quiescence as contrasted with the lively movements of the sperm. Today one notes an opposite tendency on the part of some scientists. The discoveries made in the course of experiments on parthenogenesis have led them to reduce the function of the sperm to that of a simple physicochemical reagent. It has been shown that in certain species the stimulus of an acid or even of a needle-prick is enough to initiate the cleavage of the egg and the development of the embryo. On this basis it has been boldly suggested that the male gamete (sperm) is not necessary for reproduction, that it acts at most as a ferment; further, that perhaps in time the co-operation of the male will become unnecessary in procreation—the answer, it would seem, to many a woman's prayer. But there is no warrant for so bold an expectation, for nothing warrants us in universalizing specific life processes. The phenomena of asexual propogation and of parthenogenesis appear to be neither more nor less fundamental than those of sexual reproduction. I have said that the latter has no claim *a priori* to be considered basic; but neither does any fact indicate that it is reducible to any more fundamental mechanism.

Thus, admitting no *a priori* doctrine, no dubious theory, we are confronted by a fact for which we can offer no basis in the nature of things nor any explanation through observed data, and the significance of which we cannot comprehend *a priori*. We can hope to grasp the significance of sexuality only by studying it in its concrete manifestations; and then perhaps the meaning of the word *female* will stand revealed.

I do not intend to offer here a philosophy of life; and I do not care to take sides prematurely in the dispute between the mechanistic and the purposive or teleological philosophies. It is to be noted, however, that all physiologists and biologists use more or less finalistic language, if only because they ascribe meaning to vital phenomena. I shall adopt their

[1] HEGEL, *Philosophy of Nature.*

terminology. Without taking any stand on the relation between life and consciousness, we can assert that every biological fact implies transcendence, that every function involves a project, something to be done. Let my words be taken to imply no more than that.

In the vast majority of species male and female individuals co-operate in reproduction. They are defined primarily as male and female by the gametes which they produce—sperms and eggs respectively. In some lower plants and animals the cells that fuse to form the zygote are identical; and these cases of isogamy are significant because they illustrate the basic equivalence of the gametes.[1] In general the gametes are differentiated, and yet their equivalence remains a striking fact. Sperms and eggs develop from similar primordial germ cells in the two sexes. The development of oocytes from the primordial cells in the female differs from that of spermatocytes in the male chiefly in regard to the protoplasm, but the nuclear phenomena are clearly the same. The biologist Ancel suggested in 1903 that the primordial germ cell is indifferent and undergoes development into sperm or egg depending upon which type of gonad, testis or ovary, contains it. However this may be, the primordial germ cells of each sex contain the same number of chromosomes (that characteristic of the species concerned), which number is reduced to one half by closely analogous process in male and female. At the end of these developmental processes (called spermatogenesis in the male and oogenesis in the female) the gametes appear fully matured as sperms and eggs, differing enormously in some respects, as noted below, but being alike in that each contains a single set of equivalent chromosomes.

Today it is well known that the sex of offspring is determined by the chromosome constitution established at the time of fertilization. According to the species concerned, it is either the male gamete or the female gamete that accom-

[1] Isogamous gametes are identical in appearance, but in some cases (certain fungi and protozoans) experiment has shown conclusively that invisible physiological differences exist, for two gametes will not fuse unless they come from different strains of the species. Here may be traced a sexual differentiation more fundamental than that of egg and sperm or male and female organism. As the author says, the gametes are equivalent; but it may well be that they are never absolutely identical, as the term *isogamy* implies.—TR.

plishes this result. In the mammals it is the sperm, of which two kinds are produced in equal numbers, one kind containing an X-chromosome (as do all the eggs), the other kind containing a Y-chromosome (not found in the eggs). Aside from the X- and Y-chromosomes, egg and sperm contain an equivalent set of these bodies. It is obvious that when sperm and egg unite in fertilization, the fertilized egg will contain two full sets of chromosomes, making up the number characteristic of the species—48 in man, for example. If fertilization is accomplished by an X-bearing sperm, the fertilized egg will contain two X-chromosomes and will develop into a female (XX). If the Y-bearing sperm fertilizes the egg, only one X-chromosome will be present and the sex will be male (XY). In birds and butterflies the situation is reversed, though the principle remains the same; it is the eggs that contain either X or Y and hence determine the sex of the offspring. In the matter of heredity, the laws of Mendel show that the father and the mother play equal parts. The chromosomes contain the factors of heredity (genes), and they are conveyed equally in egg and sperm.

What we should note in particular at this point is that neither gamete can be regarded as superior to the other; when they unite, both lose their individuality in the fertilized egg. There are two common suppositions which—at least on this basic biological level—are clearly false. The first—that of the passivity of the female—is disproved by the fact that new life springs from the union of the two gametes; the living spark is not the exclusive property of either. The nucleus of the egg is a centre of vital activity exactly symmetrical with the nucleus of the sperm. The second false supposition contradicts the first—which does not seem to prevent their coexistence. It is to the effect that the permanence of the species is assured by the female, the male principle being of an explosive and transitory nature. As a matter of fact, the embryo carries on the germ plasm of the father as well as that of the mother, and transmits them together to its descendants under now male, now female form. It is, so to speak, an androgynous germ plasm, which outlives the male or female individuals that are its incarnations, whenever they produce offspring.

This said, we can turn our attention to secondary differences between egg and sperm, which are of the greatest interest. The essential peculiarity of the egg is that it is provided with means for nourishing and protecting the embryo;

it stores up reserve material from which the fetus will build its tissues, material that is not living substance but inert yolk. In consequence the egg is of massive, commonly spherical form and relatively large. The size of birds' eggs is well known; in woman the egg is almost microscopic, about equal in size to a printed period (diameter .132-.135 mm.), but the human sperm is far smaller (.04-.06 mm. in length), so small that a cubic millimetre would hold 60,000. The sperm has a threadlike tail and a small, flattened oval head, which contains the chromosomes. No inert substance weighs it down; it is wholly alive. In its whole structure it is adapted for mobility. Whereas the egg, big with the future of the embryo, is stationary; enclosed within the female body or floating externally in water, it passively awaits fertilization. It is the male gamete that seeks it out. The sperm is always a naked cell; the egg may or may not be protected with shell and membranes according to the species; but in any case, when the sperm makes contact with the egg, it presses against it, sometimes shakes it, and bores into it. The tail is dropped and the head enlarges, forming the male nucleus, which now moves towards the egg nucleus. Meanwhile the egg quickly forms a membrane, which prevents the entrance of other sperms. In the starfish and other echinoderms, where fertilization takes place externally, it is easy to observe the onslaught of the sperms, which surround the egg like an aureole. The competition involved is an important phenomenon, and it occurs in most species. Being much smaller than the egg, the sperm is generally produced in far greater numbers (more than 200,000,000 to 1 in the human species), and so each egg has numerous suitors.

Thus the egg—active in its essential feature, the nucleus—is superficially passive; its compact mass, sealed up within itself, evokes nocturnal darkness and inward repose. It was the form of the sphere that to the ancients represented the circumscribed world, the impenetrable atom. Motionless, the egg waits; in contrast the sperm—free, slender, agile—typifies the impatience and the restlessness of existence. But allegory should not be pushed too far. The ovule has sometimes been likened to immanence, the sperm to transcendence, and it has been said that the sperm penetrates the female element only in losing its transcendence, its motility; it is seized and castrated by the inert mass that engulfs it after depriving it of its tail. This is magical action—disquieting, as is all passive

action—whereas the activity of the male gamete is rational; it is movement measurable in terms of time and space. The truth is that these notions are hardly more than vagaries of the mind. Male and female gametes fuse in the fertilized egg; they are both suppressed in becoming a new whole. It is false to say that the egg greedily swallows the sperm, and equally so to say that the sperm victoriously commandeers the female cell's reserves, since in the act of fusion the individuality of both is lost. No doubt movement seems to the mechanistic mind to be an eminently rational phenomenon, but it is an idea no clearer for modern physics than action at a distance. Besides, we do not know in detail the physico-chemical reactions that lead up to gametic union. We can derive a valid suggestion, however, from this comparison of the gametes. There are two interrelated dynamic aspects of life: it can be maintained only through transcending itself, and it can transcend itself only on condition that it is maintained. These two factors always operate together and it is unrealistic to try to separate them, yet now it is one and now the other that dominates. The two gametes at once transcend and perpetuate themselves when they unite; but in its structure the egg anticipates future needs, it is so constituted as to nourish the life that will wake within it. The sperm, on the contrary, is in no way equipped to provide for the development of the embryo it awakens. On the other hand, the egg cannot provide the change of environment that will stimulate a new outburst of life, whereas the sperm can and does travel. Without the foresight of the egg, the sperm's arrival would be in vain; but without the initiative of the latter, the egg would not fulfil its living potentialities.

We may conclude, then, that the two gametes play a fundamentally identical role; together they create a living being in which both of them are at once lost and transcended. But in the secondary and superficial phenomena upon which fertilization depends, it is the male element which provides the stimuli needed for evoking new life and it is the female element that enables this new life to be lodged in a stable organism.

It would be foolhardy indeed to deduce from such evidence that woman's place is in the home—but there are foolhardy men. In his book *Le Tempérament et le charactère,* Alfred Fouillée undertakes to found his definition of woman *in toto* upon the egg and that of man upon the spermatozoon; and a number of supposedly profound theories rest upon this

play of doubtful analogies. It is a question to what philosophy of nature these dubious ideas pertain; not to the laws of heredity, certainly, for according to these laws, men and women alike develop from an egg and a sperm. I can only suppose that in such misty minds there still float shreds of the old philosophy of the Middle Ages which taught that the cosmos is an exact reflection of a microcosm—the egg is imagined to be a little female, the woman a giant egg. These musings, generally abandoned since the days of alchemy, make a bizarre contrast with the scientific precision of the data upon which they are now based, for modern biology conforms with difficulty to medieval symbolism. But our theorizers do not look too closely into the matter. In all honesty it must be admitted that in any case it is a long way from the egg to woman. In the unfertilized egg not even the concept of femaleness is as yet established. As Hegel justly remarks, the sexual relation cannot be referred back to the relation of the gametes. It is our duty, then, to study the female organism as a whole.

It has already been pointed out that in many plants and in some animals (such as snails) the presence of two kinds of gametes does not require two kinds of individuals, since every individual produces both eggs and sperms. Even when the sexes are separate, they are not distinguished in any such fashion as are different species. Males and females appear rather to be variations on a common groundwork, much as the two gametes are differentiated from similar original tissue. In certain animals (for example, the marine worm *Bonellia*) the larva is asexual, the adult becoming male or female according to the circumstances under which it has developed. But as noted above (page 31), sex is determined in most species by the genotypic constitution of the fertilized egg. In bees the unfertilized eggs laid by the queen produce males exclusively; in aphids parthenogenetic eggs usually produce females. But in most animals all eggs that develop have been fertilized, and it is notable that the sexes are produced in approximately equal numbers through the mechanism of chromosomal sex-determination, already explained.

In the embryonic development of both sexes the tissue from which the gonads will be formed is at first indifferent; at a certain stage either testes or ovaries become established; and similarly in the development of the other sex organs there is an early indifferent period when the sex of the

embryo cannot be told from an examination of these parts, from which, later on, the definitive male or female structures arise. All this helps to explain the existence of conditions intermediate between hermaphroditism and gonochorism (sexes separate). Very often one sex possesses certain organs characteristic of the other; a case in point is the toad, in which there is in the male a rudimentary ovary called Bidder's organ, capable of producing eggs under experimental conditions. Among the mammals there are indications of this sexual bipotentiality, such as the *uterus masculinus* and the rudimentary mammary glands in the male, and in the female Gärtner's canal and the clitoris. Even in those species exhibiting a high degree of sexual differentiation individuals combining both male and female characteristics may occur. Many cases of intersexuality are known in both animals and man; and among insects and crustaceans one occasionally finds examples of gynandromorphism, in which male and female areas of the body are mingled in a kind of mosaic.

The fact is that the individual, though its genotypic sex is fixed at fertilization, can be profoundly affected by the environment in which it develops. In the ants, bees, and termites the larval nutrition determines whether the genotypic female individual will become a fully developed female ('queen') or a sexually retarded worker. In these cases the whole organism is affected; but the gonads do not play a part in establishing the sexual differences of the body, or *soma*. In the vertebrates, however, the hormones secreted by the gonads are the essential regulators. Numerous experiments show that by varying the hormonal (endocrine) situation, sex can be profoundly affected. Grafting and castration experiments on adult animals and man have contributed to the modern theory of sexuality, according to which the soma is in a way identical in male and female vertebrates. It may be regarded as a kind of neutral element upon which the influence of the gonad imposes the sexual characteristics.[1] Some of the hormones secreted by the gonad act as stimulators, others as inhibitors. Even the genital tract itself is somatic, and embryological investigations show that it develops in the male or female direction from an indifferent and

[1] In connection with this view, it must be remembered that in man and many animals the soma is not strictly neutral, since all its cells are genotypically either male (XY) or female (XX). This is why the young individual normally produces either the male or the female hormonal environment, leading normally to the development of either male or female characteristics.—Tr.

in some respects hermaphroditic condition under the hormonal influence. Intersexuality may result when the hormones are abnormal and hence neither one of the two sexual potentialities is exclusively realized.

Numerically equal in the species and developed similarly from like beginnings, the fully formed male and female are basically equivalent. Both have reproductive glands—ovaries or testes—in which the gametes are produced by strictly corresponding processes, as we have seen. These glands discharge their products through ducts that are more or less complex according to sex; in the female the egg may pass directly to the outside through the oviduct, or it may be retained for a time in the cloaca or the uterus before expulsion; in the male the semen may be deposited outside, or there may be a copulatory organ through which it is introduced into the body of the female. In these respects, then, male and female appear to stand in a symmetrical relation to each other. To reveal their peculiar, specific qualities it will be necessary to study them from the functional point of view.

It is extremely difficult to give a generally valid definition of the female. To define her as the bearer of the eggs and the male as bearer of the sperms is far from sufficient, since the relation of the organism to the gonads is, as we have seen, quite variable. On the other hand, the differences between the gametes have no direct effect upon the organism as a whole; it has sometimes been argued that the eggs, being large, consume more vital energy than do the sperms, but the latter are produced in such infinitely greater numbers that the expenditure of energy must be about equal in the two sexes. Some have wished to see in spermatogenesis an example of prodigality and in oogenesis a model of economy, but there is an absurd liberality in the latter, too, for the vast majority of eggs are never fertilized.[1] In no way do gametes and gonads represent in microcosm the organism as a whole. It is to this—the whole organism—that we must now direct our attention.

One of the most remarkable features to be noted as we survey the scale of animal life is that as we go up, individuality is seen to be more and more fully developed. At the bottom, life is concerned only in the survival of the species

[1] For example, a woman produces about 400 eggs and at most 25 or 30 children; in animals the disproportion is often much greater.—TR.

as a whole; at the top, life seeks expression through particular individuals, while accomplishing also the survival of the group. In some lower species the organism may be almost entirely reduced to the reproductive apparatus; in this case the egg, and hence the female, is supreme, since the egg is especially dedicated to the mere propagation of life; but here the female is hardly more than an abdomen, and her existence is entirely used up in a monstrous travail of ovulation. In comparison with the male, she reaches giant proportions; but her appendages are often tiny, her body a shapeless sac, her organs degenerated in favour of the eggs. Indeed, such males and females, although they are distinct organisms, can hardly be regarded as individuals, for they form a kind of unity made up of inseparable elements. In a way they are intermediate between hermaphroditism and gonochorism.

Thus in certain Crustacea, parasitic on the crab, the female is a mere sac enclosing millions of eggs, among which are found the minute males, both larval and adult. In *Edriolydnus* the dwarf male is still more degenerate; it lives under the shell of the female and has no digestive tract of its own, being purely reproductive in function. But in all such cases the female is no less restricted than the male; it is enslaved to the species. If the male is bound to the female, the latter is no less bound down, either to a living organism on which it exists as a parasite or to some substratum; and its substance is consumed in producing eggs which the tiny male fertilizes.

Among somewhat higher animals an individual autonomy begins to be manifested and the bond that joins the sexes weakens; but in the insects they both remain strictly subordinated to the eggs. Frequently, as in the mayflies, male and female die immediately after copulation and egg-laying. In some rotifers the male lacks a digestive tract and dies after fecundation; the female is able to eat and survives long enough at least to develop and lay the eggs. The mother dies after the appearance of the next generation is assured. The privileged position held by the females in many insects comes from the fact that the production and sometimes the care of the eggs demand a long effort, whereas fecundation is for the most part quickly accomplished.

In the termites the enormous queen, crammed with nourishment and laying as many as 4000 eggs per day until she becomes sterile and is pitilessly killed, is no less a slave than the comparatively tiny male who attends her and provides

frequent fecundations. In the matriarchal ants' nests and beehives the males are economically useless and are killed off at times. At the season of the nuptial flight in ants, all the males emerge with females from the nest; those that succeed in mating with females die at once, exhausted; the rest are not permitted by the workers to re-enter the nest, and die of hunger or are killed. The fertilized female has a gloomy fate; she buries herself alone in the ground and often dies while laying her first eggs, or if she succeeds in founding a colony she remains shut in and may live for ten or twelve years constantly producing more eggs. The workers, females with atrophied sexuality, may live for several years, but their life is largely devoted to raising the larvae. It is much the same with bees; the drone that succeeds in mating with the queen during the nuptial flight falls to earth disembowelled; the other drones return to the hive, where they live a lazy life and are in the way until at the approach of winter they are killed off by the workers. But the workers purchase their right to live by incessant toil; as in the ants they are undeveloped females. The queen is in truth enslaved to the hive, laying eggs continually. If she dies, the workers give several larvae special food so as to provide for the succession; the first to emerge kills the rest in their cells.

In certain spiders the female carries the eggs about with her in a silken case until they hatch. She is much larger and stronger than the male and may kill and devour him after copulation, as does an insect, the praying mantis, around which has crystallized the myth of devouring femininity—the egg castrates the sperm, the mantis murders her spouse, these acts foreshadowing a feminine dream of castration. The mantis, however, shows her cruelty especially in captivity; and under natural conditions, when she is free in the midst of abundant food, she rarely dines on the male. If she does eat him, it is to enable her to produce her eggs and thus perpetuate the race, just as the solitary fertilized ant often eats some of her own eggs under the same necessity. It is going far afield to see in these facts a proclamation of the 'battle of the sexes' which sets individuals, as such, one against another. It cannot simply be said that in ants, bees, termites, spiders, or mantises the female enslaves and sometimes devours the male, for it is the species that in different ways consumes them both. The female lives longer and seems to be more important than the male; but she has no independence—egg-laying and the care of eggs and larvae

are her destiny, other functions being atrophied wholly or in part.

In the male, on the contrary, an individual existence begins to be manifested. In impregnation he very often shows more initiative than the female, seeking her out, making the approach, palpating, seizing, and forcing connection upon her. Sometimes he has to battle for her with other males. Accordingly the organs of locomotion, touch, and prehension are frequently more highly evolved in the male. Many female moths are wingless, while the males have wings; and often the males of insects have more highly developed colours, wing-covers, legs, and pincers. And sometimes to this endowment is added a seeming luxury of brilliant coloration. Beyond the brief moment of copulation the life of the male is useless and irresponsible; compared with the industriousness of the workers, the idleness of the drones seems a remarkable privilege. But this privilege is a social disgrace, and often the male pays with his life for his futility and partial independence. The species, which holds the female in slavery, punishes the male for his gesture towards escape; it liquidates him with brutal force.

In higher forms of life, reproduction becomes the creation of discrete organisms; it takes on a double role: maintenance of the species and creation of new individuals. This innovating aspect becomes the more unmistakable as the singularity of the individual becomes pronounced. It is striking then that these two essential elements—perpetuation and creation—are separately apportioned to the two sexes. This separation, already indicated at the moment when the egg is fertilized, is to be discerned in the whole generative process. It is not the essential nature of the egg that requires this separation, for in higher forms of life the female has, like the male, attained certain autonomy and her bondage to the egg has been relaxed. The female fish, batracian, or bird is far from being a mere abdomen. The less strictly the mother is bound to the egg, the less does the labour of reproduction represent an absorbing task and the more uncertainty there is in the relations of the two parents with their offspring. It can even happen that the father will take charge of the newly hatched young, as in various fishes.

Water is an element in which the eggs and sperms can float about and unite, and fecundation in the aquatic environment is most always external. Most fish do not copulate, at most stimulating one another by contact. The mother

discharges the eggs, the father the sperm—their role is identical. There is no reason why the mother, any more than the father, should feel responsibility for the eggs. In some species the eggs are abandoned by the parents and develop without assistance; sometimes a nest is prepared by the mother and sometimes she watches over the eggs after they have been fertilized. But very often it is the father who takes charge of them. As soon as he has fertilized them, he drives away the female to prevent her from eating them, and he protects them savagely against any intruder. Certain males have been described as making a kind of protective nest by blowing bubbles of air enclosed in an insulating substance; and in many cases they protect the developing eggs in their mouths or, as in the seahorse, in abdominal folds.

In the batrachians (frogs and toads) similar phenomena are to be seen. True copulation is unknown to them; they practise amplexus, the male embracing the female and thus stimulating her to lay her eggs. As the eggs are discharged, the sperms are deposited upon them. In the obstetrical toad the male wraps the strings of eggs about his hind legs and protects them, taking them into the water when the young are about to hatch as tadpoles.

In birds the egg is formed rather slowly inside the female; it is relatively large and is laid with some difficulty. It is much more closely associated with the mother than with the father, who has simply fertilized it in a brief copulation. Usually the mother sits on the eggs and takes care of the newly hatched young; but often the father helps in nest-building and in the protection and feeding of the young birds. In rare cases—for example, among the sparrows—the male does the incubating and rearing. Male and female pigeons secrete in the crop a milky fluid with which they both feed the fledglings. It is remarkable that in these cases where the male takes part in nourishing the young, there is no production of sperms during the time devoted to them—while occupied in maintaining life the male has no urge to beget new living beings.

In the mammals life assumes the most complex forms, and individualization is most advanced and specific. There the division of the two vital components—maintenance and creation—is realized definitively in the separation of the sexes. It is in this group that the mother sustains the closest relations—among vertebrates—with her offspring, and the father shows less interest in them. The female organism is

wholly adapted for and subservient to maternity, while sexual initiative is the prerogative of the male.

The female is the victim of the species. During certain periods in the year, fixed in each species, her whole life is under the regulation of a sexual cycle (the oestrus cycle), of which the duration, as well as the rhythmic sequence of events, varies from one species to another. This cycle consists of two phases: during the first phase the eggs (variable in number according to the species) become mature and the lining of the uterus becomes thickened and vascular ; during the second phase (if fertilization has not occurred) the egg disappears, the uterine edifice breaks down, and the material is eliminated in a more or less noticeable temporary flow, known as menstruation in woman and related higher mammals. If fertilization does occur, the second phase is replaced by pregnancy. The time of ovulation (at the end of the first phase) is known as *oestrus* and it corresponds to the period of rut, heat, or sexual activity.

In the female mammal, rut is largely passive ; she is ready and waiting to receive the male. It may happen in mammals —as in certain birds—that she solicits the male, but she does no more than appeal to him by means of cries, displays, and suggestive attitudinizing. She is quite unable to force copulation upon him. In the end it is he who makes the decision. We have seen that even in the insects, where the female is highly privileged in return for her total sacrifice to the species, it is usually the male who takes the initiative in fecundation ; among the fishes he often stimulates the female to lay her eggs through his presence and contact ; and in the frogs and toads he acts as a stimulator in amplexus. But it is in birds and mammals especially that he forces himself upon her, while very often she submits indifferently or even resists him.

Even when she is willing, or provocative, it is unquestionably the male who *takes* the female—she is *taken*. Often the word applies literally, for whether by means of special organs or through superior strength, the male seizes her and holds her in place ; he performs the copulatory movements ; and, among insects, birds, and mammals, he penetrates her. In this penetration her inwardness is violated, she is like an enclosure that is broken into. The male is not doing violence to the species, for the species survives only in being constantly renewed and would come to an end if eggs and sperms did not come together ; but the female, entrusted

with the protection of the egg, locks it away inside herself, and her body, in sheltering the egg, shields it also from the fecundating action of the male. Her body becomes, therefore, a resistance to be broken through, whereas in penetrating it the male finds self-fulfilment in activity.

His domination is expressed in the very posture of copulation—in almost all animals the male is *on* the female. And certainly the organ he uses is a material object, but it appears here in its animated state—it is a tool—whereas in this performance the female organ is more in the nature of an inert receptacle. The male deposits his semen, the female receives it. Thus, though the female plays a fundamentally active role in procreation, she *submits to* the coition, which invades her individuality and introduces an alien element through penetration and internal fertilization. Although she may feel the sexual urge as a personal need, since she seeks out the male when in heat, yet the sexual adventure is immediately experienced by her as an interior event and not as an outward relation to the world and to others.

But the fundamental difference between male and female mammals lies in this: the sperm, through which the life of the male is transcended in another, at the same instant becomes a stranger to him and separates from his body; so that the male recovers his individuality intact at the moment when he transcends it. The egg, on the contrary, begins to separate from the female body when, fully matured, it emerges from the follicle and falls into the oviduct; but if fertilized by a gamete from outside, it becomes attached again through implantation in the uterus. First violated, the female is then alienated—she becomes, in part, another than herself. She carries the fetus inside her abdomen until it reaches a stage of development that varies according to the species—the guinea-pig is born almost adult, the kangaroo still almost an embryo. Tenanted by another, who battens upon her substance throughout the period of pregnancy, the female is at once herself and other than herself; and after the birth she feeds the newborn upon the milk of her breasts. Thus it is not too clear when the new individual is to be regarded as autonomous: at the moment of fertilization, of birth, or of weaning? It is noteworthy that the more clearly the female appears as a separate individual, the more imperiously the continuity of life asserts itself against her separateness. The fish and the bird, which expel the egg from the body before the embryo develops, are less enslaved to

their offspring than is the female mammal. She regains some autonomy after the birth of her offspring—a certain distance is established between her and them; and it is following upon a separation that she devotes herself to them. She displays initiative and inventiveness in their behalf; she battles to defend them against other animals and may even become aggressive. But normally she does not seek to affirm her individuality; she is not hostile to males or to other females and shows little combative instinct.[1] In spite of Darwin's theory of sexual selection, now much disputed. she accepts without discrimination whatever male happens to be at hand. It is not that the female lacks individual abilities—quite the contrary. At times when she is free from maternal servitude she can now and then equal the male; the mare is as fleet as the stallion, the hunting bitch has as keen a nose as the dog, she-monkeys in tests show as much intelligence as males. It is only that this individuality is not laid claim to; the female renounces it for the benefit of the species, which demands this abdication.

The lot of the male is quite different. As we have just seen, even in his transcendence towards the next generation he keeps himself apart and maintains his individuality within himself. This characteristic is constant, from the insect to the highest animals. Even in the fishes and whales, which live peaceably in mixed schools, the males separate from the rest at the time of rut, isolate themselves, and become aggressive towards other males. Immediate, direct in the female, sexuality is indirect, it is experienced through intermediate circumstances, in the male. There is a distance between desire and satisfaction which he actively surmounts; he pushes, seeks out, touches the female, caresses and quiets her before he penetrates her. The organs used in such activities are, as I have remarked, often better developed in the male than in the female. It is notable that the living impulse that brings about the vast production of sperms is expressed also in the male by the appearance of bright plumage, brilliant scales, horns, antlers, a mane, by his voice, his exuberance. We no longer believe that the 'wedding finery' put on by the male during rut, nor his seductive posturings, have selective significance; but they do manifest the power of life, bursting forth in him with useless and

[1] Certain fowls wrangle over the best places in the poultry-yard and establish a hierarchy of dominance (the 'peck-order'); and sometimes among cattle there are cows that will fight for the leadership of the herd in the absence of males.

magnificent splendour. This vital superabundance, the activities directed towards mating, and the dominating affirmation of his power over the female in coitus itself—all this contributes to the assertion of the male individual as such at the moment of his living transcendence. In this respect Hegel is right in seeing the subjective element in the male, while the female remains wrapped up in the species. Subjectivity and separateness immediately signify conflict. Aggressiveness is one of the traits of the rutting male; and it is not explained by competition for mates, since the number of females is about equal to the number of males; it is rather the competition that is explained by this will to combat. It might be said that before procreating, the male claims as his own the act that perpetuates the species, and in doing battle with his peers confirms the truth of his individuality. The species takes residence in the female and absorbs most of her individual life; the male on the contrary integrates the specific vital force into his individual life. No doubt he also submits to powers beyond his control: the sperms are formed within him and periodically he feels the rutting urge; but these processes involve the sum total of the organism in much less degree than does the oestrus cycle. The production of sperms is not exhausting, nor is the actual production of eggs; it is the development of the fertilized egg inside an adult animal that constitutes for the female an engrossing task. Coition is a rapid operation and one that robs the male of little vitality. He displays almost no paternal instinct. Very often he abandons the female after copulation. When he remains near her as head of a family group—monogamic family, harem, or herd—he nurtures and protects the community as a whole; only rarely does he take a direct interest in the young. In the species capable of high individual development, the urge of the male towards autonomy—which in lower animals is his ruin—is crowned with success. He is in general larger than the female, stronger, swifter, more adventurous; he leads a more independent life, his activities are more spontaneous; he is more masterful, more imperious. In mammalian societies it is always he who commands.

In nature nothing is ever perfectly clear. The two types, male and female, are not always sharply distinguished; while they sometimes exhibit a dimorphism—in coat colour or in arrangement of spotting or mottling—that seems absolutely distinctive, yet it may happen, on the contrary,

that they are indistinguishable and that even their functions are hardly differentiated, as in many fishes. All in all, however, and especially at the top of the animal scale, the two sexes represent two diverse aspects of the life of the species. The difference between them is not, as has been claimed, that between activity and passivity; for the nucleus of the egg is active and moreover the development of the embryo is an active, living process, not a mechanical unfolding. It would be too simple to define the difference as that between change and permanence: for the sperm can create only because its vitality is maintained in the fertilized egg, and the egg can persist only through developmental change, without which it deteriorates and disappears.

It is true, however, that in these two processes, *maintaining* and *creating* (both of which are active), the synthesis of becoming is not accomplished in the same manner. To *maintain* is to deny the scattering of instants, it is to establish continuity in their flow; to *create* is to strike out from temporal unity in general an irreducible, separate present. And it is true also that in the female it is the continuity of life that seeks accomplishment in spite of separation; while separation into new and individualized forces is incited by male initiative. The male is thus permitted to express himself freely; the energy of the species is well integrated into his own living activity. On the contrary, the individuality of the female is opposed by the interest of the species; it is as if she were possessed by foreign forces—alienated. And this explains why the contrast between the sexes is not reduced when—as in higher forms—the individuality of the organisms concerned is more pronounced. On the contrary, the contrast is increased. The male finds more and more varied ways in which to employ the forces he is master of; the female feels her enslavement more and more keenly, the conflict between her own interests and the reproductive forces is heightened. Parturition in cows and mares is much more painful and dangerous than it is in mice and rabbits. Woman—the most individualized of females—seems to be the most fragile, most subject to this pain and danger: she who most dramatically fulfils the call of destiny and most profoundly differs from her male.

In man as in most animals the sexes are born in approximately equal numbers, the sex ratio for Western man being about 105.5 males to 100 females. Embryological development is analogous in the two sexes; however, in the female

embryo the primitive germinal epithelium (from which ovary or testis develops) remains neutral longer and is therefore under the hormonal influence for a longer time, with the result that its development may be more often reversed. Thus it may be that the majority of pseudo-hermaphrodites[1] are genotypically female subjects that have later become masculinized. One might suppose that the male organization is defined as such at the beginning, whereas the female embryo is slower in taking on its feminity; but these early phenomena of fetal life are still too little known to permit of any certainty in interpretation.

Once established, the genital systems correspond in the two sexes, and the sex hormones of both belong to the same chemical group, that of the sterols; all are derived in the last analysis from cholesterol. They regulate the secondary sexual differences of the soma. Neither the chemical formulae of the hormones nor the anatomical peculiarities are sufficient to define the human female as such. It is her functional development that distinguishes her especially from the male.

The development of the male is comparatively simple. From birth to puberty his growth is almost regular; at the age of fifteen or sixteen spermatogenesis begins, and it continues into old age; with its appearance hormones are produced that establish the masculine bodily traits. From this point on, the male sex life is normally integrated with his individual existence: in desire and in coition his transcendence towards the species is at one with his subjectivity —he *is* his body.

Woman's story is much more complex. In embryonic life the supply of oocytes is already built up, the ovary containing about 40,000 immature eggs, each in a follicle, of which perhaps 400 will ultimately reach maturation. From birth, the species has taken possession of woman and tends to tighten its grasp. In coming into the world woman experiences a kind of first puberty, as the oocytes enlarge suddenly; then the ovary is reduced to about a fifth of its former size—

[1] This difficult subject is magnificently treated from every point of view in H. H. YOUNG'S *Genital Abnormalities, Hermaphroditism, and Related Adrenal Diseases* (Baltimore, 1937). According to Dr. Young, only twenty cases of true hermaphroditism in man have been medically attested; but pseudo-hermaphrodites —having gonads of one sex with genitalia and sometimes secondary sex characters of the opposite sex—are numerous.—TR.

one might say that the child is granted a respite. While her body develops, her genital system remains almost stationary; some of the follicles enlarge, but they fail to mature. The growth of the little girl is similar to that of the boy; at the same age she is sometimes even taller and heavier than he is. But at puberty the species reasserts its claim. Under the influence of the ovarian secretions the number of developing follicles increases, the ovary receives more blood and grows larger, one of the follicles matures, ovulation occurs, and the menstrual cycle is initiated; the genital system assumes its definitive size and form, the body takes on feminine contours, and the endocrine balance is established.

It is to be noted that this whole occurrence has the aspect of a *crisis*. Not without resistance does the body of woman permit the species to take over; and this struggle is weakening and dangerous. Before puberty almost as many boys die as girls; from age fourteen to eighteen, 128 girls die to 100 boys, and from eighteen to twenty-two, 105 girls to 100 boys.[1] At this period frequently appear such diseases as chlorosis, tuberculosis, scoliosis (curvature of the spine), and osteomyelitis (inflammation of the bone marrow). In some cases puberty is abnormally precocious, appearing as early as age four or five. In others, on the contrary, puberty fails to become established, the subject remaining infantile and suffering from disorders of menstruation (amenorrhea or dysmenorrhea). Certain women shows signs of virilism, taking on masculine traits as a result of excessive adrenal secretion.

Such abnormalities in no way represent victories of the individual over the species; there is no way of escape, for as it enslaves the individual life, the species simultaneously supports and nourishes it. This duality is expressed at the level of the ovarian functions, since the vitality of woman has its roots in the ovaries as that of man in the testicles. In both sexes a castrated individual is not merely sterile; he or she suffers regression, degenerates. Not properly constituted, the whole organism is impoverished and thrown out of balance; it can expand and flourish only as its genital system

[1] Recent statistics show that in the United States among the white population there is no age level at which the death rate for women is higher than that of men. Among Negroes where conditions are doubtless less favourable on the average, the female death rate is higher only between the ages of fifteen and nineteen. (SCHEINFELD, *Women and Men,* chap. XVI, Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1943.)—TR.

expands and flourishes. And furthermore many reproductive phenomena are unconcerned with the individual life of the subject and may even be sources of danger. The mammary glands, developing at puberty, play no role in woman's individual economy: they can be excised at any time of life. Many of the ovarian secretions function for the benefit of the egg, promoting its maturation and adapting the uterus to its requirements; in respect to the organism as a whole they make for disequilibration rather than for regulation—the woman is adapted to the needs of the egg rather than to her own requirements.

From puberty to menopause woman is the theatre of a play that unfolds within her and in which she is not personally concerned. Anglo-Saxons call menstruation 'the curse'; in truth the menstrual cycle is a burden, and a useless one from the point of view of the individual. In Aristotle's time it was believed that each month blood flowed away that was intended, if fertilization had occurred, to build up the blood and flesh of the infant, and the truth of that old notion lies in the fact that over and over again woman does sketch in outline the groundwork of gestation. In lower mammals this oestrus cycle is confined to a particular season, and it is not accompanied by a flow of blood; only in the primates (monkeys, apes, and the human species) is it marked each month by blood and more or less pain.[1] During about fourteen days one of the Graafian follicles that enclose the eggs enlarges and matures, secreting the hormone folliculin (estrin). Ovulation occurs on about the fourteenth day: the follicle protrudes through the surface of the ovary and breaks open (sometimes with slight bleeding), the egg passes into the oviduct, and the wound develops into the corpus luteum. The latter secretes the hormone progesterone, which acts on the uterus during the second phase of the cycle. The lining of the uterus becomes thickened and glandular and full of blood vessels, forming in the womb a cradle to receive the fertilized egg. These cellular prolifera-

[1] 'Analysis of these phenomena in recent years has shown that they are similar in woman and the higher monkeys and apes, especially in the genus Rhesus. *It is evidently easier to experiment with these animals,*' writes Louis Gallien (*La Sexualité*).

[In the United States extensive research has been done on the sex physiology of the larger apes by Yerkes and others, especially at the Laboratories of Primate Biology at Yale University and in Florida (ROBERT M. YERKES, *Champanzees,* Yale University Press, 1943).—TR.]

tions being irreversible, the edifice is not resorbed if fertilization has not occurred. In the lower mammals the debris may escape gradually or may be carried away by the lymphatic vessels; but in woman and the other primates, the thickened lining membrane (endometrium) breaks down suddenly, the blood vessels and blood spaces are opened, and the bloody mass trickles out as the menstrual flow. Then, while the corpus luteum regresses, the membrane that lines the uterus is reconstituted and a new follicular phase of the cycle begins.

This complex process, still mysterious in many of its details, involves the whole female organism, since there are hormonal reactions between the ovaries and other endocrine organs, such as the pituitary, the thyroid, and the adrenals, which affect the central nervous system, the sympathetic nervous system, and in consequence all the viscera. Almost all women—more than 85 per cent—show more or less distressing symptoms during the menstrual period. Blood pressure rises before the beginning of the flow and falls afterwards; the pulse rate and often the temperature are increased, so that fever is frequent; pains in the abdomen are felt; often a tendency to constipation followed by diarrhoea is observed; frequently there are also swelling of the liver, retention of urea, and albuminuria; many subjects have sore throat and difficulties with hearing and sight; perspiration is increased and accompanied at the beginning of the menses by an odour *sui generis,* which may be very strong and may persist throughout the period. The rate of basal metabolism is raised. The red blood count drops. The blood carries substances usually put on reserve in the tissues, especially calcium salts; the presence of these substances reacts on the ovaries, on the thyroid—which enlarges—and on the pituitary (regulator of the changes in the uterine lining described above)—which becomes more active. This glandular instability brings on a pronounced nervous instability. The central nervous system is affected, with frequent headache, and the sympathetic system is overactive; unconscious control through the central system is reduced, freeing convulsive reflexes and complexes and leading to a marked capriciousness of disposition. The woman is more emotional, more nervous, more irritable than usual, and may manifest serious psychic disturbance. It is during her periods that she feels her body most painfully as an obscure, alien thing; it is, indeed, the prey of a stubborn and foreign life that each month constructs and then tears down a cradle within it;

each month all things are made ready for a child and then aborted in the crimson flow. Woman, like man, *is* her body ;[1] but her body is something other than herself.

Woman experiences a more profound alienation when fertilization has occurred and the dividing egg passes down into the uterus and proceeds to develop there. True enough, pregnancy is a normal process, which, if it takes place under normal conditions of health and nutrition, is not harmful to the mother ; certain interactions between her and the fetus become established which are even beneficial to her. In spite of an optimistic view having all too obvious social utility, however, gestation is a fatiguing task of no individual benefit to the woman[2] but on the contrary demanding heavy sacrifices. It is often associated in the first months with loss of appetite and vomiting, which are not observed in any female domesticated animal and which signalize the revolt of the organism against the invading species.[3] There is a loss of phosphorus, calcium, and iron—the last difficult to make good later ; metabolic overactivity excites the endocrine system ; the sympathetic nervous system is in a state of increased excitement ; and the blood shows a lowered specific gravity, it is lacking in iron, and in general it is similar 'to that of persons fasting, of victims of famine, of those who have been bled frequently, of convalescents'.[4] All that a healthy and well-nourished woman can hope for is to recoup these losses without too much difficulty after childbirth ; but frequently serious accidents or at least dangerous disorders mark the course of pregnancy ; and if the woman is not strong, if hygienic precautions are not taken, repeated childbearing will make her prematurely old and misshapen, as often among the rural poor. Childbirth itself is painful and dangerous. In this crisis it is most clearly evident that the body does not always work to the advantage of both species and individual at once ; the infant may die, and again, in being born it may kill its mother or leave her with a chronic

[1] 'So I am my body, in so far, at least, as my experience goes, and conversely my body is like a life-model, or like a preliminary sketch, for my total being.' (MERLEAU-PONTY, *Phénoménologie de la perception.*)

[2] I am taking here an exclusively physiological point of view. It is evident that maternity can be very advantageous psychologically for a woman, just as it can also be a disaster.

[3] It may be said that these symptoms also signalize a faulty diet, according to some modern gynaecologists.—TR.

[4] Cf. H. VIGNES in the *Traité de physiologie*, vol. XI, edited by Roger and Binet.

ailment. Nursing is also a tiring service. A number of factors —especially the hormone prolactin—bring about the secretion of milk in the mammary glands; some soreness and often fever may accompany the process and in any case the nursing mother feeds the newborn from the resources of her own vitality. The conflict between species and individual, which sometimes assumes dramatic force at childbirth, endows the feminine body with a disturbing frailty. It has been well said that women 'have infirmity in the abdomen'; and it is true that they have within them a hostile element—it is the species gnawing at their vitals. Their maladies are often caused not by some infection from without but by some internal maladjustment; for example, a false inflammation of the endometrium is set up through the reaction of the uterine lining to an abnormal excitation of the ovaries; if the corpus luteum persists instead of declining after menstruation, it causes inflammation of the oviducts and uterine lining, and so on.

In the end woman escapes the iron grasp of the species by way of still another serious crisis; the phenomena of the menopause, the inverse of puberty, appear between the ages of forty-five and fifty. Ovarian activity diminishes and disappears, with resulting impoverishment of the individual's vital forces. It may be supposed that the metabolic glands, the thyroid and pituitary, are compelled to make up in some fashion for the functioning of the ovaries; and thus, along with the depression natural to the change of life, are to be noted signs of excitation, such as high blood pressure, hot flushes, nervousness, and sometimes increased sexuality. Some women develop fat deposits at this time; others become masculinized. In many, a new endocrine balance becomes established. Woman is now delivered from the servitude imposed by her female nature; but she is not to be likened to a eunuch, for her vitality is unimpaired. And what is more, she is no longer the prey of overwhelming forces; she is herself, she and her body are one. It is sometimes said that women of a certain age constitute 'a third sex'; and, in truth, while they are not males, they are no longer females. Often, indeed, this release from female physiology is expressed in a health, a balance, a vigour that they lacked before.

In addition to the primary sexual characteristics, woman has various secondary sexual peculiarities that are more or less directly produced in consequence of the first, through

hormonal action. On the average she is shorter than the male and lighter, her skeleton is more delicate, and the pelvis is larger in adaptation to the functions of pregnancy and childbirth ; her connective tissues accumulate fat and her contours are thus more rounded than those of the male. Appearance in general—structure, skin, hair—is distinctly different in the two sexes. Muscular strength is much less in woman, about two thirds that of man ; she has less respiratory capacity, the lungs and trachea being smaller. The larynx is relatively smaller, and in consequence the female voice is higher. The specific gravity of the blood is lower in woman and there is less haemoglobin ; women are therefore less robust and more disposed to anaemia than are males. Their pulse is more rapid, the vascular system less stable, with ready blushing. Instability is strikingly characteristic of woman's organization in general ; among other things, man shows greater stability in the metabolism of calcium, woman fixing much less of this material and losing a good deal during menstruation and pregnancy. It would seem that in regard to calcium the ovaries exert a catabolic action, with resulting instability that brings on difficulties in the ovaries and in the thyroid, which is more developed in woman than in man. Irregularities in the endocrine secretions react on the sympathetic nervous system, and nervous and muscular control is uncertain. This lack in stability and control underlies woman's emotionalism, which is bound up with circulatory fluctuations—palpitation of the heart, blushing, and so forth—and on this account women are subject to such displays of agitation as tears, hysterical laughter, and nervous crises.

It is obvious once more than many of these traits originate in woman's subordination to the species, and here we find the most striking conclusion of this survey ; namely, that woman is of all mammalian females at once the one who is most profoundly alienated (her individuality the prey of outside forces), and the one who most violently resists this alienation ; in no other is enslavement of the organism to reproduction more imperious or more unwillingly accepted. Crises of puberty and the menopause, monthly 'curse', long and often difficult pregnancy, painful and sometimes dangerous childbirth, illnesses, unexpected symptoms and complications—these are characteristic of the human female. It would seem that her lot is heavier than that of other females in just about the same degree that she goes beyond other females in the assertion of her individuality. In comparison with her the

male seems infinitely favoured: his sexual life is not in opposition to his existence as a person, and biologically it runs an even course, without crises and generally without mishap. On the average, women live as long as men, or longer; but they are much more often ailing, and there are many times when they are not in command of themselves.

These biological considerations are extremely important. In the history of woman they play a part of the first rank and constitute an essential element in her situation. Throughout our further discussion we shall always bear them in mind. For, the body being the instrument of our grasp upon the world, the world is bound to seem a very different thing when apprehended in one manner or another. This accounts for our lengthy study of the biological facts; they are one of the keys to the understanding of woman. But I deny that they establish for her a fixed and inevitable destiny. They are insufficient for setting up a hierarchy of the sexes; they fail to explain why woman is the Other; they do not condemn her to remain in this subordinate role for ever.

It has frequently been maintained that in physiology alone must be sought the answers to these questions: Are the chances for individual success the same in the two sexes? Which plays the more important role in the species? But it must be noted that the first of these problems is qùite different in the case of woman, as compared with other females; for animal species are fixed and it is possible to define them in static terms—by merely collecting observations it can be decided whether the mare is as fast as the stallion, or whether male chimpanzees excel their mates in intelligence tests—whereas the human species is for ever in a state of change, for ever becoming.

Certain materialistic savants have approached the problem in a purely static fashion; influenced by the theory of psycho-physiological parallelism, they sought to work out mathematical comparisons between the male and female organism—and they imagined that these measurements registered directly the functional capacities of the two sexes. For example, these students have been engaged in elaborately trifling discussions regarding the absolute and relative weight of the brain in man and woman—with inconclusive results, after all corrections have been made. But what destroys much of the interest of these careful researches is the fact that it has not been possible to establish any relation what-

ever between the weight of the brain and the level of intelligence. And one would similarly be at loss to present a psychic interpretation of the chemical formulae designating the male and female hormones.

As for the present study, I categorically reject the notion of psychophysiological parallelism, for it is a doctrine whose foundations have long since been thoroughly undermined. If I mention it at all, it is because it still haunts many minds in spite of its philosophical and scientific bankruptcy. I reject also any comparative system that assumes the existence of a *natural* hierarchy or scale of values—for example, an evolutionary hierarchy. It is vain to ask if the female body is or is not more infantile than that of the male, if it is more or less similar to that of the apes, and so on. All these dissertations which mingle a vague naturalism with a still more vague ethics or aesthetics are pure verbiage. It is only in a human perspective that we can compare the female and the male of the human species. But man is defined as a being who is not fixed, who makes himself what he is. As Merleau-Ponty very justly puts it, man is not a natural species: he is a historical idea. Woman is not a completed reality, but rather a becoming, and it is in her becoming that she should be compared with man; that is to say, her *possibilities* should be defined. What gives rise to much of the debate is the tendency to reduce her to what she has been, to what she is today, in raising the question of her capabilities; for the fact is that capabilities are clearly manifested only when they have been realized—but the fact is also that when we have to do with a being whose nature is transcendent action, we can never close the books.

Nevertheless it will be said that if the body is not a *thing*, it is a situation, as viewed in the perspective I am adopting—that of Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty: it is the instrument of our grasp upon the world, a limiting factor for our projects. Woman is weaker than man, she has less muscular strength, fewer red blood corpuscles, less lung capacity, she runs more slowly, can lift less heavy weights, can compete with man in hardly any sport; she cannot stand up to him in a fight. To all this weakness must be added the instability, the lack of control, and the fragility already discussed: these are facts. Her grasp on the world is thus more restricted; she has less firmness and less steadiness available for projects that in general she is less capable

of carrying out. In other words, her individual life is less rich .than man's.

Certainly these facts cannot be denied—but in themselves they have no significance. Once we adopt the human perspective, interpreting the body on a basis of existence, biology becomes an abstract science; whenever the physiological fact (for instance, muscular inferiority) takes on meaning, this meaning is at once seen as dependent on a whole context; the 'weakness' is revealed as such only in the light of the ends man proposes, the instruments he has available, and the laws he establishes. If he does not wish to seize the world, then the idea of a *grasp* on things has no sense; when in this seizure the full employment of bodily power is not required, above the available minimum, then differences in strength are annulled; wherever violence is contrary to custom, muscular force cannot be a basis for domination. In brief, the concept of *weakness* can be defined only with reference to existentialist, economic, and moral considerations. It has been said that the human species is anti-natural, a statement that is hardly exact, since man cannot deny facts; but he establishes their truth by the way in which he deals with them; nature has reality for him only to the extent that it is involved in his activity—his own nature not excepted. As with her grasp on the world, it is again impossible to measure in the abstract the burden imposed on woman by her reproductive function. The bearing of maternity upon the individual life, regulated naturally in animals by the oestrus cycle and the seasons, is not definitely prescribed in woman—society alone is the arbiter. The bondage of woman to the species is more or less rigorous according to the number of births demanded by society and the degree of hygienic care provided for pregnancy and childbirth. Thus, while it is true that in the higher animals the individual existence is asserted more imperiously by the male than by the female, in the human species individual 'possibilities' depend upon the economic and social situation.

But in any case it does not always happen that the male's individual privileges give him a position of superiority within the species, for in maternity the female acquires a kind of autonomy of her own. Sometimes, as in the baboons studied by Zuckermann,[1] the male does dominate; but in many species the two members of the pair lead a separate

[1] *The Social Life of Monkeys and Apes* (1932).

life, and in the lion the two sexes share equally in the duties of the den. Here again the human situation cannot be reduced to any other; it is not as single individuals that human beings are to be defined in the first place; men and women have never stood opposed to each other in single combat; the couple is an original *Mitsein*, a basic combination; and as such it always appears as a permanent or temporary element in a larger collectivity.

Within such a society, which is more necessary to the species, male or female? At the level of the gametes, at the level of the biological functions of coition and pregnancy, the male principle creates to maintain, the female principle maintains to create, as we have seen; but what are the various aspects of this division of labour in different forms of social life? In sessile species, attached to other organisms or to substrata, in those furnished by nature with abundant sustenance obtainable without effort, the role of the male is limited to fecundation; where it is necessary to seek, to hunt, to fight in order to provide the food needed by the young, the male in many cases co-operates in their support. This co-operation becomes absolutely indispensable in a species where the offspring remain unable to take care of themselves for a long time after weaning; here the male's assistance becomes extremely important, for the lives he has begotten cannot be maintained without him. A single male can fecundate a number of females each year; but it requires a male for every female to assure the survival of the offspring after they are born, to defend them against enemies, to wrest from nature the wherewithal to satisfy their needs. In human history the equilibrium between the forces of production and of reproduction is brought about by different means under different economic conditions, and these conditions govern the relations of male and female to offspring and in consequence to each other. But here we are leaving the realm of biology; by its light alone we could never decide the primacy of one sex or the other in regard to the perpetuation of the species.

But in truth a society is not a species, for it is in a society that the species attains the status of existence—transcending itself towards the world and towards the future. Its ways and customs cannot be deduced from biology, for the individuals that compose the society are never abandoned to the dictates of their nature; they are subject rather to that second nature which is custom and in which are reflected

the desires and the fears that express their essential nature. It is not merely as a body, but rather as a body subject to taboos, to laws, that the subject is conscious of himself and attains fulfilment—it is with reference to certain values that he evaluates himself. And, once again, it is not upon physiology that values can be based; rather, the facts of biology take on the values that the existent bestows upon them. If the respect or the fear inspired by woman prevents the use of violence towards her, then the muscular superiority of the male is no source of power. If custom decrees—as in certain Indian tribes—that the young girls are to choose their husbands, or if the father dictates the marriage choice, then the sexual aggressiveness of the male gives him no power of initiative, no advantage. The close bond between mother and child will be for her a source of dignity according to the value placed upon the child—which is highly variable—and this very bond, as we have seen, will be recognized or not according to the presumptions of the society concerned.

Thus we must view the facts of biology in the light of an ontological, economic, social, and psychological context. The enslavement of the female to the species and the limitations of her various powers are extremely important facts; the body of woman is one of the essential elements in her situation in the world. But that body is not enough to define her as woman; there is no true living reality except as manifested by the conscious individual through activities and in the bosom of a society. Biology is not enough to give an answer to the question that is before us: why is woman the *Other*? Our task is to discover how the nature of woman has been affected throughout the course of history; we are concerned to find out what humanity has made of the human female.

CHAPTER II

# THE PSYCHOANALYTIC POINT OF VIEW

THE tremendous advance accomplished by psychoanalysis over psychophysiology lies in the view that no factor becomes involved in the psychic life without having taken on human significance; it is not the body-object described by biologists that actually exists, but the body as lived in by the subject. Woman is a female to the extent that she feels herself as such. There are biologically essential features that are not a part of her real, experienced situation: thus the structure of the egg is not reflected in it, but on the contrary an organ of no great biological importance, like the clitoris, plays in it a part of the first rank. It is not nature that defines woman; it is she who defines herself by dealing with nature on her own account in her emotional life.

An entire system has been built up in this perspective, which I do not intend to criticize as a whole, merely examining its contribution to the study of woman. It is not an easy matter to discuss psychoanalysis *per se*. Like all religions—Christianity and Marxism, for example—it displays an embarrassing flexibility on a basis of rigid concepts. Words are sometimes used in their most literal sense, the term *phallus*, for example, designating quite exactly that fleshy projection which marks the male; again, they are indefinitely expanded and take on symbolic meaning, the phallus now expressing the virile character and situation *in toto*. If you attack the letter of his doctrine, the psychoanalyst protests that you misunderstand its spirit; if you applaud its spirit, he at once wishes to confine you to the letter. The doctrine is of no importance, says one, psychoanalysis is a method; but the success of the method strengthens the doctrinaire in his faith. After all, where is one to find the true lineaments of psychoanalysis if not among the psychoanalysts? But there are heretics among these, just as there are among Christians and Marxists; and more than one psychoanalyst has declared that 'the worst enemies of psychoanalysis are the pyschoanalysts.'

In spite of a scholastic precision that often becomes pedantic, many obscurities remain to be dissipated. As Sartre and Merleau-Ponty have observed, the proposition 'Sexuality is co-extensive with existence' can be understood in two very different ways; it can mean that every appearance of the existent has a sexual significance, or that every sexual phenomenon has an existential import. It is possible to reconcile these statements, but too often one merely slips from one to the other. Furthermore, as soon as the 'sexual' is distinguished from the 'genital', the idea of sexuality becomes none too clear. According to Dalbiez, 'the sexual with Freud is the intrinsic aptitude for releasing the genital'. But nothing is more obscure than the idea of 'aptitude'—that is, of possibility—for only realization gives indubitable proof of what is possible. Not being a philosopher, Freud has justly refused to justify his system philosophically; and his disciples maintain that on this account he is exempt from all metaphysical attack. There are metaphysical assumptions behind all his dicta, however, and to use his language is to adopt a philosophy. It is just such confusions that call for criticism, while making criticism difficult.

Freud never showed much concern with the destiny of woman; it is clear that he simply adapted his account from that of the destiny of man, with slight modifications. Earlier the sexologist Marañon had stated that 'As specific energy, we may say that the libido is a force of virile character. We will say as much of the orgasm.' According to him, women who attain orgasm are 'viriloid' women; the sexual impulse is 'in one direction' and the woman is only half way along the road. Freud never goes to such an extreme; he admits that woman's sexuality is evolved as fully as man's; but he hardly studies it in particular. He writes: 'The libido is constantly and regularly male in essence, whether it appears in man or in woman.' He declines to regard the feminine libido as having its own original nature, and therefore it will necessarily seem to him like a complex deviation from the human libido in general. This develops at first, he thinks, identically in the two sexes—each infant passes first through an oral phase that fixates it upon the maternal breast, and then through an anal phase; finally it reached the genital phase, at which point the sexes become differentiated.

Freud further brought to light a fact the importance of which had not been fully appreciated: namely, that masculine erotism is definitely located in the penis, whereas in woman

there are two distinct erotic systems: one the clitoral, which develops in childhood, the other vaginal, which develops only after puberty. When the boy reaches the genital phase, his evolution is completed, though he must pass from the auto-erotic inclination, in which pleasure is subjective, to the hetero-erotic inclination, in which pleasure is bound up with an object, normally woman. This transition is made at the time of puberty through a narcissistic phase. But the penis will remain, as in childhood, the specific organ of erotism. Woman's libido, also passing through a narcissistic phase, will become objective, normally towards man; but the process will be much more complex, because woman must pass from clitoral pleasure to vaginal. There is only one genital stage for man, but there are two for woman; she runs a much greater risk of not reaching the end of her sexual evolution, of remaining at the infantile stage and thus of developing neuroses.

While still in the auto-erotic stage, the child becomes more or less strongly attached to an object. The boy becomes fixed on his mother and desires to identify himself with his father; this presumption terrifies him and he dreads mutilation at the hands of his father in punishment for it. Thus the castration complex springs from the Oedipus complex. Then aggressiveness towards the father develops, but at the same time the child interiorizes the father's authority; thus the super-ego is built up in the child and censures his incestuous tendencies. These are repressed, the complex is liquidated, and the son is freed from his fear of his father, whom he has now installed in his own psyche under the guise of moral precepts.[1] The super-ego is more powerful in proportion as the Oedipus complex has been more marked and more rigorously resisted.

Freud at first described the little girl's history in a completely corresponding fashion, later calling the feminine form of the process the Electra complex; but it is clear that he defined it less in itself than upon the basis of his masculine pattern. He recognized a very important difference between the two, however: the little girl at first has a mother fixation, but the boy is at no time sexually attracted to the father. This fixation of the girl represents a survival of the oral phase. Then the child identifies herself with the father; but towards

[1] 'The super-ego or conscience is a precipitate of all the prohibitions and inhibitions that were originally inculcated into us by our parents, especially by the father.' (BRILL, *Freud's Contribution to Psychiatry* [W. W. Norton & Co., 1944], p. 153).—TR.

the age of five she dicovers the anatomical difference between the sexes, and she reacts to the absence of the penis by acquiring a castration complex—she imagines that she has been mutilated and is pained at the thought. Having then to renounce her virile pretensions, she identifies herself with her mother and seeks to seduce the father. The castration complex and the Electra complex thus reinforce each other. Her feeling of frustration is the keener since, loving her father, she wished in vain to be like him ; and, inversely, her regret strengthens her love, for she is able to compensate for her inferiority through the affection she inspires in her father. The little girl entertains a feeling of rivalry and hostility towards her mother. Then the super-ego is built up also in her, and the incestuous tendencies are repressed ; but her super-ego is not so strong, for the Electra complex is less sharply defined than the Oedipus because the first fixation was upon the mother, and since the father is himself the object of the love that he condemns, his prohibitions are weaker than in the case of his son-rival. It can be seen that like her genital development the whole sexual drama is more complex for the girl than for her brothers. In consequence she may be led to react to the castration complex by denying her femininity, by continuing obstinately to covet a penis and to identify herself with her father. This attitude will cause her to remain in the clitoral phase, to become frigid, or turn towards homosexuality.

The two essential objections that may be raised against this view derive from the fact that Freud based it upon a masculine model. He assumes that woman feels that she is a mutilated man. But the idea of mutilation implies comparison and evaluation. Many psychoanalysts today admit that the young girl may regret not having a penis without believing, however, that it has been removed from her body ; and even this regret is not general. It could not arise from a simple anatomical comparison ; many little girls, in fact, are late in discovering the masculine construction, and if they do, it is only by sight. The little boy obtains from his penis a living experience that makes it an object of pride to him, but this pride does not necessarily imply a corresponding humiliation for his sisters, since they know the masculine organ in its outward aspect only—this outgrowth, this weak little rod of flesh can in itself inspire them only with indifference, or even disgust. The little girl's covetousness, when it exists, results from a previous evaluation of virility. Freud takes this for granted,

when it should be accounted for.[1] On the other hand, the concept of the Electra complex is very vague, because it is not supported by a basic description of the feminine libido. Even in boys the occurrence of a definitely genital Oedipus complex is by no means general; but, apart from very few exceptions, it cannot be admitted that the father is a source of genital excitation for his young daughter. One of the great problems of feminine eroticism is that clitoral pleasure is localized; and it is only towards puberty that a number of erogenous zones develop in various parts of the body, along with the growth of vaginal sensation. To say, then, that in a child of ten the kisses and caresses of her father have an 'intrinsic aptitude' for arousing clitoral pleasure is to assert something that in most cases is nonsense. If it is admitted that the Electra complex has only a very diffuse emotional character, then the whole question of emotion is raised. Freudianism does not help us in defining emotion as distinguished from sexuality. What deifies the father is by no means the feminine libido (nor is the mother deified by the desire she arouses in the son); on the contrary, the fact that the feminine desire (in the daughter) is directed towards a sovereign being gives it a special character. It does not determine the nature of its object; rather it is affected by the latter. The sovereignty of the father is a fact of social origin, which Freud fails to account for; in fact, he states that it is impossible to say what authority decided, at a certain moment in history, that the father should take precedence over the mother—a decision that, according to Freud, was progressive, but due to causes unknown. 'It could not have been patriarchal authority, since it is just this authority which progress conferred upon the father', as he puts it in his last work.[2]

Adler took issue with Freud because he saw the deficiency of a system that undertook to explain human life upon the basis of sexuality alone; he holds that sexuality should be integrated with the total personality. With Freud all human behaviour seems to be the outcome of desire—that is, of the search for pleasure—but for Adler man appears to be aiming at certain goals; for the sexual urge he substitutes motives, purposes, projects. He gives so large a place to the intelligence

[1] This discussion will be resumed at much greater length in Book Two (published as a separate volume, *The Second Sex*), chap. I.

[2] FREUD, *Moses and Monotheism*, translated by Katherine Jones (Alfred A. Knopf, 1939).

that often the sexual has in his eyes only a symbolic value. According to his system, the human drama can be reduced to three elemental factors: in every individual there is a *will to power*, which, however, is accompanied by an *inferiority complex*; the resulting conflict leads the individual to employ a thousand ruses in a *flight from reality*—a reality with which he fears he may not be able to cope; the subject thus withdraws to some degree from the society of which he is apprehensive and hence becomes afflicted with the neuroses that involve disturbance of the social attitude. In woman the inferiority complex takes the form of a shamed rejection of her femininity. It is not the lack of the penis that causes this complex, but rather woman's total situation; if the little girl feels penis envy it is only as the symbol of privileges enjoyed by boys. The place the father holds in the family, the universal predominance of males, her own education—everything confirms her in her belief in masculine superiority. Later on, when she takes part in sexual relations, she finds a new humiliation in the coital posture that places woman underneath the man. She reacts through the 'masculine protest': either she endeavours to masculinize herself or she makes use of her feminine weapons to wage war upon the male. Through maternity she may be able to find an equivalent of the penis in her child. But this supposes that she begins by wholly accepting her role as woman and that she assumes her inferiority. She is divided against herself much more profoundly than is the male.

I shall not enlarge here upon the theoretical differences that separate Adler and Freud nor upon the possibilities of a reconciliation; but this may be said: neither the explanation based upon the sexual urge nor that based upon motive is sufficient, for every urge poses a motive, but the motive is apprehended only through the urge—a synthesis of Adlerianism and Freudianism would therefore seem possible of realization. In fact, Adler retains the idea of psychic causation as an integral part of his system when he introduces the concepts of goal and of finality, and he is somewhat in accord with Freud in regard to the relation between drives and mechanism: the physicist always recognizes determinism when he is concerned with conflict or a force of attention. The axiomatic proposition held in common by all psychoanalysts is this: the human story is to be explained by the interplay of determinate elements. And all the psychoanalysts allot the same destiny to woman. Her drama is epitomized in the con-

flict between her 'viriloid' and her 'feminine' tendencies, the first expressed through the clitoral system, the second in vaginal erotism. As a child she identifies herself with her father ; then she becomes possessed with a feeling of inferiority with reference to the male and is faced with a dilemma: either to assert her independence and become virilized—which, with the underlying complex of inferiority, induces a state of tension that threatens neurosis—or to find happy fulfilment in amorous submission, a solution that is facilitated by her love for the sovereign father. He it is whom she really seeks in lover or husband, and thus her sexual love is mingled with the desire to be dominated. She will find her recompense in maternity, since that will afford her a new kind of independence. This drama would seem to be endowed with an energy, a dynamism, of its own ; it steadily pursues its course through any and all distorting incidents, and every woman is passively swept along in it.

The psychoanalysts have had no trouble in finding empirical confirmation for their theories. As we know, it was possible for a long time to explain the position of the planets on the Ptolemaic system by adding to it sufficiently subtle complications ; and by superposing an inverse Oedipus complex upon the Oedipus complex, by disclosing desire in all anxiety, success has been achieved in integrating with the Freudian system the very facts that appear to contradict its validity. It is possible to make out a form only against a background, and the way in which the form is apprehended brings out the background behind it in positive detail ; thus, if one is determined to describe a special case in a Freudian perspective, one will encounter the Freudian scheme behind it. But when a doctrine demands the indefinite and arbitrary multiplication of secondary explanations, when observation brings to light as many exceptions as instances conformable to rule, it is better to give up the old rigid framework. Indeed, every psychoanalyst today is busily engaged after his own fashion in making the Freudian concepts less rigid and in attempting compromise. For example, a contemporary psychoanalyst[1] writes as follows: "Wherever there is a complex, there are by definition a number of components . . . The complex consists in the association of these disparate elements and not in the representation of one among them by the others.' But the concept of a simple association of elements is unacceptable, for the psychic life is not a mosaic, it is a single whole in every one of its aspects

[1] BAUDOUIN, *L'Ame enfantine et la psychanalyse.*

and we must respect that unity. This is possible only by our recovering through the disparate facts the original purposiveness of existence. If we do not go back to this source, man appears to be the battleground of compulsions and prohibitions that alike are devoid of meaning and incidental.

All psychoanalysts systematically reject the idea of *choice* and the correlated concept of value, and therein lies the intrinsic weakness of the system. Having dissociated compulsions and prohibitions from the free choice of the existent, Freud fails to give us an explanation of their origin—he takes them for granted. He endeavoured to replace the idea of value with that of authority ; but he admits in *Moses and Monotheism* that he has no way of accounting for this authority. Incest, for example, is forbidden because the father has forbidden it—but why did he forbid it? It is a mystery. The super-ego interiorizes, introjects commands and prohibitions emanating from an arbitrary tyranny, and the instinctive drives are there, we know not why: these two realities are unrelated because morality is envisaged as foreign to sexuality. The human unity appears to be disrupted, there is no thoroughfare from the individual to society ; to reunite them Freud was forced to invent strange fictions, as in *Totem and Taboo*. Adler saw clearly that the castration complex could be explained only in social context ; he grappled with the problem of valuation, but he did not reach the source in the individual values recognized by society, and he did not grasp the fact that values are involved in sexuality itself, which led him to misjudge its importance.

Sexuality most certainly plays a considerable role in human life ; it can be said to pervade life throughout. We have already learned from physiology that the living activity of the testes and the ovaries is integrated with that of the body in general. The existent is a sexual, a sexuate body, and in his relations with other existents who are also sexuate bodies, sexuality is in consequence always involved. But if body and sexuality are concrete expressions of existence, it is with reference to this that their significance can be discovered. Lacking this perspective, psychoanalysis takes for granted unexplained facts. For instance, we are told that the little girl is *ashamed* of urinating in a squatting position with her bottom uncovered—but whence comes this shame? And likewise, before asking whether the male is proud of having a penis or whether his pride is expressed in his penis, it is necessary to know what pride is and how the aspirations of the sub-

ject can be incarnated in an object. There is no need of taking sexuality as an irreducible datum, for there is in the existent a more original 'quest of being', of which sexuality is only one of the aspects. Sartre demonstrates this truth in *L'Etre et le néant*, as does Bachelard in his works on Earth, Air, and Water. The psychoanalysts hold that the primary truth regarding man is his relation with his own body and with the bodies of his fellows in the group; but man has a primordial interest in the substance of the natural world which surrounds him and which he tries to discover in work, in play, and in all the experiences of the 'dynamic imagination'. Man aspires to be at one concretely with the whole world, apprehended in all possible ways. To work the earth, to dig a hole, are activities as original as the embrace, as coition, and they deceive themselves who see here no more than sexual symbols. The hole, the ooze, the gash, hardness, integrity are primary realities; and the interest they have for man is not dictated by the libido, but rather the libido will be coloured by the manner in which he becomes aware of them. It is not because it symbolizes feminine virginity that integrity fascinates man; but it is his admiration for integrity that renders virginity precious. Work, war, play, art signify ways of being concerned with the world which cannot be reduced to any others; they disclose qualities that interfere with those which sexuality reveals. It is at once in their light and in the light of these erotic experiences that the individual exercises his power of choice. But only an ontological point of view, a comprehension of being in general, permits us to restore the unity of this choice.

It is this concept of choice, indeed, that psychoanalysis most vehemently rejects in the name of determinism and the 'collective unconscious'; and it is this unconscious that is supposed to supply man with prefabricated imagery and a universal symbolism. Thus it would explain the observed analogies of dreams, of purposeless actions, of visions of delirium, of allegories, and of human destines. To speak of liberty would be to deny oneself the possibility of explaining these disturbing conformities. But the idea of liberty is not incompatible with the existence of certain constants. If the psychoanalytic method is frequently rewarding in spite of the errors in its theory, that is because there are in every individual case certain factors of undeniable generality: situations and behaviour patterns constantly recur, and the moment of decision flashes from a cloud of generality and repetition. 'Anatomy is des-

tiny', said Freud; and this phrase is echoed by that of Merleau-Ponty: 'The body is generality.' Existence is all one, bridging the gaps between individual existents; it makes itself manifest in analogous organisms, and therefore constant factors will be found in the bonds between the ontological and the sexual. At a given epoch of history the techniques, the economic and social structure of a society, will reveal to all its members an identical world, and there a constant relation of sexuality to social patterns will exist; analogous individuals, placed in analogous conditions, will see analogous points of significance in the given circumstances. This analogy does not establish a rigorous universality, but it accounts for the fact that general types may be recognized in individual case histories.

The symbol does not seem to me to be an allegory elaborated by a mysterious unconscious; it is rather the perception of a certain significance through the analogue of the significant object. Symbolic significance is manifested in the same way to numerous individuals, because of the identical situation connecting all the individual existents, and the identical set of artificial conditions that all must confront. Symbolism did not come down from heaven nor rise up from subterranean depths—it has been elaborated, like language, by that human reality which is at once *Mitsein* and separation; and this explains why individual invention also has its place, as in practice psychoanalysis has to admit, regardless of doctrine. Our perspective allows us, for example, to understand the value widely accorded to the penis.[1] It is impossible to account for it without taking our departure from an existential fact: the tendency of the subject towards *alienation*. The anxiety that his liberty induces in the subject leads him to search for himself in things, which is a kind of flight from himself. This tendency is so fundamental that immediately after weaning, when he is separated from the Whole, the infant is compelled to lay hold upon his alienated existence in mirrors and in the gaze of his parents. Primitive people are alienated in mana, in the totem; civilized people in their individual souls, in their egos, their names, their property, their work. Here is to be found the primary temptation to inauthenticity, to failure to be genuinely oneself. The penis is singulary adapted for playing this role of 'double' for the little boy—it is for him at once a foreign object and himself; it is a plaything, a doll,

[1] We shall return to this subject at greater length in Book Two, chap. I.

and yet his own flesh; relatives and nurse-girls behave towards it as if it were a little person. It is easy to see, then, how it becomes for the child 'an *alter ego* ordinarily more artful, more intelligent, and more clever than the individual'.[1] The penis is regarded by the subject as at once himself and other than himself, because the functions of urination and later of erection are processes midway between the voluntary and involuntary, and because it is a capricious and as it were a foreign source of pleasure that is felt subjectively. The individual's specific transcendence takes concrete form in the penis and it is a source of pride. Because the phallus is thus set apart, man can bring into integration with his subjective individuality the life that overflows from it. It is easy to see, then, that the length of the penis, the force of the urinary jet, the strength of erection and ejaculation become for him the measure of his own worth.[2]

Thus the incarnation of transcendence in the phallus is a constant; and since it is also a constant for the child to feel transcended—that is to say, frustrated in his own transcendence by the father—we therefore continually come upon the Freudian idea of the 'castration complex'. Not having that *alter ego*, the little girl is not alienated in a material thing and cannot retrieve her integrity. On this account she is led to make an object of her whole self, to set up herself as the Other. Whether she knows that she is or is not comparable with boys is secondary; the important point is that, even if she is unaware of it, the absence of the penis prevents her from being conscious of herself as a sexual being. From this flow many consequences. But the constants I have referred to do not for all that establish a fixed destiny—the phallus assumes such worth as it does because it symbolizes a dominance that is exercised in other domains. If woman should succeed in establishing herself as subject, she would invent equivalents of the phallus; in fact, the doll, incarnating the promise of the baby that is to come in the future, can

[1] ALICE BALINT, *La Vie intime de l'enfant, p.* 101.

[2] I have been told of peasant children amusing themselves in excremental competition; the one who produced the most copious and solid feces enjoyed a prestige unmatched by any other form of success, whether in games or even in fighting. The fecal mass here plays the same part as the penis—there is alienation in both cases.

[Pride in this peculiar type of eminence is by no means confined to European peasant children; it has been observed in young Americans and is doubtless well-nigh universal.—TR.]

becomes a possession more precious than the penis.[1] There are matrilineal societies in which the women keep in their possession the *masks* in which the group finds alienation ; in such societies the penis loses much of its glory. The fact is that a true human privilege is based upon the anatomical privilege only in virtue of the total situation. Psychoanalysis can establish its truths only in the historical context.

Woman can be defined by her consciousness of her own femininity no more satisfactorily than by saying that she is a female, for she acquires this consciousness under circumstances dependent upon the society of which she is a member. Interiorizing the unconscious and the whole psychic life, the very language of psychoanalysis suggests that the drama of the individual unfolds within him—such words as *complex*, *tendency*, and so on make that implication. But a life is a relation to the world, and the individual defines himself by making his own choices through the world about him. We must therefore turn towards the world to find answers for the questions we are concerned with. In particular psychoanalysis fails to explain why woman is the *Other*. For Freud himself admits that the prestige of the penis is explained by the sovereignty of the father, and, as we have seen, he confesses that he is ignorant regarding the origin of male supremacy.

We therefore decline to accept the method of psychoanalysis, without rejecting *en bloc* the contributions of the science or denying the fertility of some of its insights. In the first place, we do not limit ourselves to regarding sexuality as something given. The insufficiency of this view is shown by the poverty of the resulting descriptions of the feminine libido ; as I have already said, the psychoanalysts have never studied it directly, but only in taking the male libido as their point of departure. They seem to ignore the fundamental ambivalence of the attraction exerted on the female by the male. Freudians and Adlerians explain the anxiety felt by the female confronted by the masculine sex as being the inversion of a frustrated desire. Stekel saw more clearly that an original reaction was concerned, but he accounts for it in a superficial manner. Woman, he says, would fear defloration, penetration, pregnancy, and pain, and such fear would restrain her desire —but this explanation is too rational. Instead of holding that

[1] We shall return to these ideas in the second part; I note them here only as a matter of method.

her desire is disguised in anxiety or is contested by fear, we should regard as an original fact this blending of urgency and apprehension which is female desire: it is the indissoluble synthesis of attraction and repulsion that characterizes it. We note that many female animals avoid copulation even as they are soliciting it, and we are tempted to accuse them of coquetry or hypocrisy ; but it is absurd to pretend to explain primitive behaviour patterns by asserting their similarity to complex modes of conduct. On the contrary, the former are in truth at the source of the attitudes that in woman are called coquetry and hypocrisy. The notion of a 'passive libido' is baffling, since the libido has been defined, on the basis of the male, as a drive, an energy ; but one would do no better to hold the opinion that a light could be at once yellow and blue —what is needed is the intuition of green. We would more fully encompass reality if instead of defining the libido in vague terms of 'energy' we brought the significance of sexuality into relation with that of other human attitudes—taking, capturing, eating, making, submitting, and so forth ; for it is one of the various modes of apprehending an object. We should study also the qualities of the erotic object as it presents itself not only in the sexual act but also to observation in general. Such an investigation extends beyond the frame of psychoanalysis, which assumes eroticism as irreducible.

Furthermore, I shall pose the problem of feminine destiny quite otherwise: I shall place woman in a world of values and give her behaviour a dimension of liberty. I believe that she has the power to choose between the assertion of her transcendence and her alienation as object ; she is not the plaything of contradictory drives ; she devises solutions of diverse values in the ethical scale. Replacing value with authority, choice with drive, psychoanalysis offers an *Ersatz,* a substitute, for morality—the concept of normality. This concept is certainly most useful in therapeutics, but it has spread through psychoanalysis in general to a disquieting extent. The descriptive schema is proposed as a law ; and most assuredly a mechanistic psychology cannot accept the notion of moral invention ; it can in strictness render an account of the *less* and never of the more ; in strictness it can admit of checks, never of creations. If a subject does not show in his totality the development considered as normal, it will be said that his development has been arrested, and this arrest will be interpreted as a lack, a negation, but never as a positive decision. This it is, among other things, that makes the psycho-

analysis of great men so shocking: we are told that such and such a transference, this or that sublimation, has not taken place in them; it is not suggested that perhaps they have refused to undergo the process, perhaps for good reasons of their own; it is not thought desirable to regard their behaviour as possibly motivated by purposes freely envisaged; the individual is always explained through ties with his past and not in respect to a future towards which he projects his aims. Thus the psychoanalysts never give us more than an inauthentic picture, and for the inauthentic there can hardly be found any other criterion than normality. Their statement of the feminine destiny is absolutely to the point in this connection. In the sense in which the psychoanalysts understand the term, 'to identify oneself' with the mother or with the father is to *alienate oneself* in a model, it is to prefer a foreign image to the spontaneous manifestation of one's own existence, it is to play at being. Woman is shown to us as enticed by two modes of alienation. Evidently to play at being a man will be for her a source of frustration; but to play at being a woman is also a delusion: to be a woman would mean to be the object, the *Other*—and the Other nevertheless remains subject in the midst of her resignation.

The true problem for woman is to reject these flights from reality and seek self-fulfilment in transcendence. The thing to do, then, is to see what possibilities are opened up for her through what are called the virile and the feminine attitudes. When a child takes the road indicated by one or the other of its parents, it may be because the child freely takes up their projects; its behaviour may be the result of a choice motivated by ends and aims. Even with Adler the will to power is only an absurd kind of energy; he denominates as 'masculine protest' every project involving transcendence. When a little girl climbs trees it is, according to Adler, just to show her equality with boys; it does not occur to him that she likes to climb trees. For the mother her child is something quite other than an 'equivalent of the penis'. To paint, to write, to engage in politics—these are not merely 'sublimations'; here we have aims that are willed for their own sakes. To deny it is to falsify all human history.

The reader will note a certain parallelism between this account and that of the psychoanalysts. The fact is that from the male point of view—which is adopted by both male and female psychoanalysts—behaviour involving alienation is regarded as feminine, that in which the subject asserts his trans-

cendence as virile. Donaldson, a historian of woman, remarked that the definitions: 'man is a male human being, woman is a female human being', have been asymmetrically distorted; and it is among the psychoanalysts in particular that man is defined as a human being and woman as a female —whenever she behaves as a human being she is said to imitate the male. The psychoanalyst describes the female child, the young girl, as incited to identification with the mother and the father, torn between 'viriloid' and 'feminine' tendencies; whereas I conceive her as hesitating between the role of *object, Other* which is offered her, and the assertion of her liberty. Thus it is that we shall agree on a certain number of facts, especially when we take up the avenues of inauthentic flight open to women. But we accord them by no means the same significance as does the Freudian or the Adlerian. For us woman is defined as a human being in quest of values in a world of values, a world of which it is indispensable to know the economic and social structure. We shall study woman in an existential perspective with due regard to her total situation.

CHAPTER III

# THE POINT OF VIEW OF HISTORICAL MATERIALISM

THE theory of historical materialism has brought to light some most important truths. Humanity is not an animal species, it is a historical reality. Human society is an antiphysis—in a sense it is against nature; it does not passively submit to the presence of nature but rather takes over the control of nature on its own behalf. This arrogation is not an inward, subjective operation; it is accomplished objectively in practical action.

Thus woman could not be considered simply as a sexual organism, for among the biological traits, only those have importance that take on concrete value in action. Woman's awareness of herself is not defined exclusively by her sexuality: it reflects a situation that depends upon the economic organization of society, which in turn indicates what stage of technical evolution mankind has attained. As we have seen, the two essential traits that characterize woman, biologically speaking, are the following: her grasp upon the world is less extended than man's, and she is more closely enslaved to the species.

But these facts take on quite different values according to the economic and social context. In human history grasp upon the world has never been defined by the naked body: the hand, with its opposable thumb, already anticipates the instrument that multiplies its power; from the most ancient records of prehistory, we see man always as armed. In times when heavy clubs were brandished and wild beasts held at bay, woman's physical weakness did constitute a glaring inferiority: if the instrument required strength slightly beyond that at woman's disposal, it was enough to make her appear utterly powerless. But, on the contrary, technique may annul the muscular inequality of man and woman: abundance makes for superiority only in the perspective of a need, and to have too much is no better than to have enough. Thus the control of many modern machines requires only a part of the masculine resources, and if the minimum demanded is

not above the female's capacity, she becomes, as far as this work is concerned, man's equal. Today, of course, vast displays of energy can be controlled by pressing a button. As for the burdens of maternity, they assume widely varying importance according to the customs of the country: they are crushing if the woman is obliged to undergo frequent pregnancies and if she is compelled to nurse and raise the children without assistance; but if she procreates voluntarily and if society comes to her aid during pregnancy and is concerned with child welfare, the burdens of maternity are light and can be easily offset by suitable adjustments in working conditions.

Engels retraces the history of woman according to this perspective in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, showing that this history depended essentially on that of techniques. In the Stone Age, when the land belonged in common to all members of the clan, the rudimentary character of the primitive spade and hoe limited the possibilities of agriculture, so that woman's strength was adequate for gardening. In this primitive division of labour, the two sexes constituted in a way two classes, and there was equality between these classes. While man hunts and fishes, woman remains in the home; but the tasks of domesticity include productive labour—making pottery, weaving, gardening—and in consequence woman plays a large part in economic life. Through the discovery of copper, tin, bronze, and iron, and with the appearance of the plough, agriculture enlarges its scope, and intensive labour is called for in clearing woodland and cultivating the fields. Then man has recourse to the labour of other men, whom he reduces to slavery. Private property appears: master of slaves and of the earth, man becomes the proprietor also of woman. This was 'the great historical defeat of the feminine sex'. It is to be explained by the upsetting of the old division of labour which occurred in consequence of the invention of new tools. 'The same cause which had assured to woman the prime authority in the house—namely, her restriction to domestic duties—this same cause now assured the domination there of the man; for woman's housework henceforth sank into insignificance in comparison with man's productive labour—the latter was everything, the former a trifling auxiliary.' Then maternal authority gave place to paternal authority, property being inherited from father to son and no longer from woman to her clan. Here we see the emergence of the patriarchal family

founded upon private property. In this type of family woman is subjugated. Man in his sovereignty indulges himself in sexual caprices, among others—he fornicates with slaves or courtesans or he practises polygamy. Wherever the local customs make reciprocity at all possible, the wife takes revenge through infidelity—marriage finds its natural fulfilment in adultery. This is woman's sole defence against the domestic slavery in which she is bound ; and it is this economic oppression that gives rise to the social oppression to which she is subjected. Equality cannot be re-established until the two sexes enjoy equal rights in law ; but this enfranchisement requires participation in general industry by the whole female sex. 'Woman can be emancipated only when she can take part on a large social scale in production and is engaged in domestic work only to an insignificant degree. And this has become possible only in the big industry of modern times, which not only admits of female labour on a grand scale but even formally demands it. . . .'

Thus the fate of woman and that of socialism are intimately bound up together, as is shown also in Bebel's great work on woman. 'Woman and the proletariat,' he says, 'are both downtrodden.' Both are to be set free through the economic development consequent upon the social upheaval brought about by machinery. The problem of woman is reduced to the problem of her capacity for labour. Puissant at the time when techniques were suited to her capabilites, dethroned when she was no longer in a position to exploit them, woman regains in the modern world her equality with man. It is the resistance of the ancient capitalistic paternalism that in most countries prevents the concrete realization of this equality ; it will be realized on the day when this resistance is broken, as is the fact already in the Soviet Union, according to Soviet propaganda. And when the socialist society is established throughout the world, there will no longer be men and women, but only workers on a footing of equality.

Although this chain of thought as outlined by Engels marks an advance upon those we have been examining, we find it disappointing—the most important problems are slurred over. The turning-point of all history is the passage from the regime of community ownership to that of private property, and it is in no wise indicated how this could have come about. Engels himself declares in *The Origin of the Family* that 'at present we know nothing about it' ; not only is he ignorant of the historical details: he does not even sug-

gest any interpretation. Similarly, it is not clear that the institution of private property must necessarily have involved the enslavement of women. Historical materialism takes for granted facts that call for explanation: Engels assumes without discussion the bond of *interest* which ties man to property ; but where does this interest, the source of social institutions, have its own source? Thus Engels's account remains superficial, and the truths that he does reveal are seemingly contingent, incidental. The fact is that we cannot plumb their meaning without going beyond the limits of historical materialism. It cannot provide solutions for the problems we have raised, because these concern the whole man and not that abstraction: *Homo oeconomicus*.

It would seem clear, for example, that the very concept of personal possession can be comprehensible only with reference to the original condition of the existent. For it to appear, there must have been at first an inclination in the subject to think of himself as basically individual, to assert the autonomy and separateness of his existence. We can see that this affirmation would have remained subjective, inward, without validity as long as the individual lacked the practical means for carrying it out objectively. Without adequate tools, he did not sense at first any power over the world, he felt lost in nature and in the group, passive, threatened, the plaything of obscure forces ; he dared think of himself only as identified with the clan: the totem, mana, the earth were group realities. The discovery of bronze enabled man, in the experience of hard and productive labour, to discover himself as creator ; dominating nature, he was no longer afraid of it, and in the fact of obstacles overcome he found courage to see himself as an autonomous active force, to achieve self-fulfilment as an individual.[1] But this accomplishment would never have been attained had not man originally willed it so ; the lesson of work is not inscribed upon a passive subject: the subject shapes and masters himself in shaping and mastering the land.

On the other hand, the affirmation of the subject's individu-

[1] GASTON BACHELARD in *La Terre et les rêveries de la volonté* makes among others a suggestive study of the blacksmith. He shows how man, through the hammer and the anvil, asserts himself and his individuality. 'The blacksmith's instant is an instant at once well marked off and magnified. It promotes the worker to the mastery of time, through the forcefulness of an instant' (p. 142); and farther on: 'The man at the forge accepts the challenge of the universe arrayed against him.'

ality is not enough to explain property: each conscious individual through challenge, struggle, and single combat can endeavour to raise himself to sovereignty. For the challenge to have taken the form of *potlatch* or ceremonial exchange of gifts—that is, of an economic rivalry—and from this point on for first the chief and then the members of the clan to have laid claim to private property, required that there should be in man another original tendency. As we have seen in the preceding chapter, the existent succeeds in finding himself only in estrangement, in alienation ; he seeks through the world to find himself in some shape, other than himself, which he makes his own. The clan encounters its own alienated existence in the totem, the mana, the terrain it occupies ; and when the individual becomes distinguished from the community, he requires a personal incarnation. The mana becomes individualized in the chief, then in each individual ; and at the same time each person tries to appropriate a piece of land, implements, crops. Man finds himself in these goods which are his because he has previously lost himself in them ; and it is therefore understandable that he places upon them a value no less fundamental than upon his very life. Thus it is that man's *interest* in his property becomes an intelligible relation. But we see that this cannot be explained through the tool alone: we must grasp in its entirety the attitude of man wielding the tool, an attitude that implies an ontological substructure, a foundation in the nature of his being.

On the same grounds it is impossible to *deduce* the oppression of woman from the institution of private property. Here again the inadequacy of Engels's pont of view is obvious. He saw clearly that woman's muscular weakness became a real point of inferiority only in its relation to the bronze and iron tool ; but he did not see that the limitations of her capacity for labour constituted in themselves a concrete disadvantage only in a certain perspective. It is because man is a being of transcendence and ambition that he projects new urgencies through every new tool: when he had invented bronze implements, he was no longer content with gardens—he wanted to clear and cultivate vast fields. And it was not from the bronze itself that this desire welled up. Woman's incapacity brought about her ruin because man regarded her in the perspectiveness of his project for enrichment and expansion. And this project is still not enough to explain why she was oppressed ; for the division of labour between the sexes could have meant a friendly association. If the original relation

between a man and his fellows was exclusively a relation of friendship, we could not account for any type of enslavement ; but no, this phenomenon is a result of the imperialism of the human consciousness, seeking always to exercise its sovereignty in objective fashion. If the human consciousness had not included the original category of the Other and an original aspiration to dominate the Other, the invention of the bronze tool could not have caused the oppression of woman.

No more does Engels account for the peculiar nature of this oppression. He tried to reduce the antagonism of the sexes to class conflict, but he was half-hearted in the attempt ; the thesis is simply untenable. It is true that division of labour according to sex and the consequent oppression bring to mind in some ways the division of society by classes, but it is impossible to confuse the two. For one thing, there is no biological basis for the separation of classes. Again, the slave in his toil is conscious of himself as opposed to his master ; and the proletariat has always put its condition to the test in revolt, thereby going back to essentials and constituting a threat to its exploiters. And what it has aimed at is its own disappearance as a class. I have pointed out in the Introduction how different woman's situation is, particularly on account of the community of life and interests which entails her solidarity with man, and also because he finds in her an accomplice ; no desire for revolution dwells within her, nor any thought of her own disappearance as a sex—all she asks is that certain sequels of sexual differentiation be abolished.

What is still more serious, woman cannot in good faith be regarded simply as a worker ; for her reproductive function is as important as her productive capacity, no less in the social economy than in the individual life. In some periods, indeed, it is more useful to produce offspring than to plough the soil. Engels slighted the problem, simply remarking that the socialist community would abolish the family—certainly an abstract solution. We know how often and how radically Soviet Russia has had to change its policy on the family according to the varying relation between the immediate needs of production and those of re-population. But for that matter, to do away with the family is not necessarily to emancipate woman. Such examples as Sparta and the Nazi regime prove that she can be none the less oppressed by the males, for all her direct attachment to the State.

A truly socialist ethics, concerned to uphold justice with-

out suppressing liberty and to impose duties upon individuals without abolishing individuality, will find most embarrassing the problems posed by the condition of woman. It is impossible to equate gestation with a *task*, a piece of work, or with a *service*, such as military service. Woman's life is more seriously broken upon by a demand for children than by regulation of the citizen's employment—no state has ever ventured to establish obligatory copulation. In the sexual act and in maternity not only time and strength but also essential values are involved for woman. Rationalist materialism tries in vain to disregard this dramatic aspect of sexuality; for it is impossible to bring the sexual instinct under a code of regulations. Indeed, as Freud said, it is not sure that it does not bear within itself a denial of its own satisfaction. What is certain is that it does not permit of integration with the social, because there is in eroticism a revolt of the instant against time, of the individual against the universal. In proposing to direct and exploit it, there is risk of killing it, for it is impossible to deal at will with living spontaneity as one deals at will with inert matter; and no more can it be obtained by force, as a privilege may be.

There is no way of directly compelling woman to bring forth: all that can be done is to put her in a situation where maternity is for her the sole outcome—the law or the mores enjoin marriage, birth control and abortion are prohibited, divorce is forbidden. These ancient patriarchal restraints are just what Soviet Russia has brought back today; Russia has revived the paternalistic concepts of marriage. And in doing so, she has been induced to ask woman once more to make of herself an erotic object: in a recent pronouncement female Soviet citizens were requested to pay careful attention to their garb, to use make-up, to employ the arts of coquetry in holding their husbands and fanning the flame of desire. As this case shows clearly, it is impossible to regard woman simply as a productive force: she is for man a sexual partner, a reproducer, an erotic object—an Other through whom he seeks himself. In vain have the totalitarian or authoritative regimes with one accord prohibited psychoanalysis and declared that individual, personal drama is out of order for citizens loyally integrated with the community; the erotic experience remains one in which generality is always regained by an individuality. And for a democratic socialism in which classes are abolished but not individuals, the question of individual destiny would keep all its importance—and hence sexual differentiation

would keep all its importance. The sexual relation that joins woman to man is not the same as that which he bears to her ; and the bond that unites her to the child is *sui generis*, unique. She was not created by the bronze tool alone ; and the machine alone will not abolish her. To claim for her every right, every chance to be an all-round human being does not mean that we should be blind to her peculiar situation. And in order to comprehend that situation we must look beyond the historical materialism that perceives in man and woman no more than economic units.

So it is that we reject for the same reasons both the sexual monism of Freud and the economic monism of Engels. A psychoanalyst will interpret all social claims of woman as phenomena of the 'masculine protest' ; for the Marxist, on the contrary, her sexuality only expresses her economic situation in more or less complex, roundabout fashion. But the categories of 'clitorid' and 'vaginal', like the categories of 'bourgeois' or 'proletarian', are equally inadequate to encompass a concrete woman. Underlying all individual drama, as it underlies the economic history of mankind, there is an existentialist foundation that alone enables us to understand in its unity that particular form of being which we call a human life. The virtue of Freudianism derives from the fact that the existent is a body: what he experiences as a body confronted by other bodies expresses his existential situation concretely. Similarly, what is true in the Marxian thesis is that the ontological aspirations—the projects for becoming—of the existent take concrete form according to the material possibilities offered, especially those opened up by technological advances. But unless they are integrated into the totality of human reality, sexuality and technology alone can explain nothing. That is why in Freud the prohibitions of the super-ego and the drives of the ego appear to be contingent, and why in Engels's account of the history of the family the most important developments seem to arise according to the caprices of mysterious fortune. In our attempt to discover woman we shall not reject certain contributions of biology, of psychoanalysis, and of historical materialism ; but we shall hold that the body, the sexual life, and the resources of technology exist concretely for man only in so far as he grasps them in the total perspective of his existence. The value of muscular strength, of the phallus, of the tool can be defined only in a world of values ; it is determined by the basic project through which the existent seeks transcendence.

# PART II

# HISTORY

CHAPTER I

# THE NOMADS

THIS has always been a man's world; and none of the reasons hitherto brought forward in explanation of this fact has seemed adequate. But we shall be able to understand how the hierarchy of the sexes was established by reviewing the data of prehistoric research and ethnography in the light of existentialist philosophy. I have already stated that when two human categories are together, each aspires to impose its sovereignty upon the other. If both are able to resist this imposition, there is created between them a reciprocal relation, sometimes in amity, always in a state of tension. If one of the two is in some way privileged, has some advantage, this one prevails over the other and undertakes to keep it in subjection. It is therefore understandable that man would wish to dominate woman; but what advantage has enabled him to carry out his will?

The accounts of the primitive forms of human society provided by ethnographers are extremely contradictory, the more so as they are better informed and less systematized. It is peculiarly difficult to form an idea of woman's situation in the pre-agricultural period. We do not even know whether woman's musculature or her respiratory apparatus, under conditions different from those of today, were not as well developed as in man. She had hard work to do, and in particular it was she who carried the burdens. The last fact is of doubtful significance; it is likely that if she was assigned this function, it was because a man kept his hands free on the trail in order to defend himself against possible aggressors, animal or human; his role was the more dangerous and the one that demanded more vigour. It would appear, nevertheless, that in many cases the women were strong and tough enough to take part in the warriors' expeditions. We need recall only

the tales of Herodotus and the more recent accounts of the amazons of Dahomey to realize that woman has shared in warfare—and with no less ferocity and cruelty than man; but even so, man's superior strength must have been of tremendous importance in the age of the club and the wild beast. In any case, however strong the women were, the bondage of reproduction was a terrible handicap in the struggle against a hostile world. Pregnancy, childbirth, and menstruation reduced their capacity for work and made them at times wholly dependent upon the men for protection and food. As there was obviously no birth control, and as nature failed to provide women with sterile periods like other mammalian females, closely spaced maternities must have absorbed most of their strength and their time, so that they were incapable of providing for the children they brought into the world. Here we have a first fact heavily freighted with consequences: the early days of the human species were difficult; the gathering, hunting, and fishing peoples got only meagre products from the soil and those with great effort; too many children were born for the group's resources; the extravagant fertility of woman prevented her from active participation in the increase of these resources while she created new needs to an indefinite extent. Necessary as she was for the perpetuation of the species, she perpetuated it too generously, and so it was the man who had to assure equilibrium between reproduction and production. Even in times when humanity most needed births, when maternity was most venerated, manual labour was the primary necessity, and woman was never permitted to take first place. The primitive hordes had no permanence in property or territory, and hence set no store by posterity; children were for them a burden, not a prized possession. Infanticide was common among the nomads, and many of the newborn that escaped massacre died from lack of care in the general state of indifference.

The woman who gave birth, therefore, did not know the pride of creation; she felt herself the plaything of obscure forces, and the painful ordeal of childbirth seemed a useless or even troublesome accident. But in any case giving birth and suckling are not *activities*, they are natural functions; no project is involved; and that is why woman found in them ne reason for a lofty affirmation of her existence—she submitted passively to her biologic fate. The domestic labours that fell to her lot because they were reconcilable with the cares of maternity imprisoned her in repetition and

immanence ;[1] they were repeated from day to day in an identical form, which was perpetuated almost without change from century to century ; they produced nothing new.

Man's case was radically different ; he furnished support for the group, not in the manner of worker bees by a simple vital process, through biological behaviour, but by means of acts that transcended his animal nature. *Homo faber* has from the beginning of time been an inventor: and the stick and the club with which he armed himself to knock down fruits and to slaughter animals became forthwith instruments for enlarging his grasp upon the world. He did not limit himself to bringing home the fish he caught in the sea: first he had to conquer the watery realm by means of the dugout fashioned from a tree-trunk ; to get at the riches of the world he annexed the world itself. In this activity he put his power to the test ; he set up goals and opened up roads towards them ; in brief, he found self-realization as an existent. To maintain, he created ; he burst out of the present, he opened the future. This is the reason why fishing and hunting expeditions had a sacred character. Their successes were celebrated with festivals and triumphs, and therein man gave recognition to his human estate. Today he still manifests this pride when he has built a dam or a skyscraper or an atomic pile. He has worked not merely to conserve the world as given ; he has broken through its frontiers, he has laid down the foundations of a new future.

Early man's activity had another dimension that gave it supreme dignity ; it was often dangerous. If blood were but a nourishing fluid, it would be valued no higher than milk ; but the hunter was no butcher, for in the struggle against wild animals he ran great risks. The warrior put his life in jeopardy to elevate the prestige of the horde, the clan to which he belonged. And in this he proved dramatically that life is not the supreme value for man, but on the contrary that it should be made to serve ends more important than itself. The worst curse that was laid upon woman was that she should be excluded from these warlike forays. For it is not in giving life but in risking life that man is raised above the animal ; that is why superiority has been accorded in

[1] This word, frequently used by the author, always signifies, as here, the opposite or negation of transcendence, such as confinement or restriction to a narrow round of uncreative and repetitious duties; it is in contrast to the freedom to engage in projects of ever widening scope that marks the untrammelled existent.—TR.

humanity not to the sex that brings forth but to that which kills.

Here we have the key to the whole mystery. On the biological level a species is maintained only by creating itself anew ; but this creation results only in repeating the same Life in more individuals. But man assures the repetition of Life while transcending Life through Existence ; by this transcendence he creates values that deprive pure repetition of all value. In the animal, the freedom and variety of male activities are vain because no project is involved. Except for his services to the species, what he does is immaterial. Whereas in serving the species, the human male also remodels the face of the earth, he creates new instruments, he invents, he shapes the future. In setting himself up as sovereign, he is supported by the complicity of woman herself. For she, too, is an existent, she feels the urge to surpass, and her project is not mere repetition but transcendence towards a different future—in her heart of hearts she finds confirmation of the masculine pretensions. She joins the men in the festivals that celebrate the successes and the victories of the males. Her misfortune is to have been biologically destines for the repetition of Life, when even in her own view Life does not carry within itself its reasons for being, reasons that are more important than the life itself.

Certain passages in the argument employed by Hegel in defining the relation of master to slave apply much better to the relation of man to woman. The advantage of the master, he says, comes from his affirmation of Spirit as against Life through the fact that he risks his own life ; but in fact the conquered slave has known this same risk. Whereas woman is basically an existent who gives Life and does not risk *her* life ; between her and the male there has been no combat. Hegel's definition would seem to apply especially well to her. He says: 'The other consciousness is the dependent consciousness for whom the essential reality is the animal type of life ; that is to say, a mode of living bestowed by another entity.' But this relation is to be distinguished from the relation of subjugation because woman also aspires to and recognizes the values that are concretely attained by the male. He it is who opens up the future to which she also reaches out. In truth women have never set up female values in opposition to male values ; it is man who, desirous of maintaining masculine prerogatives, has invented that divergence. Men have presumed to create a feminine domain—the kingdom of life,

of immanence—only in order to lock up women therein. But it is regardless of sex that the existent seeks self-justification through transcendence—the very submission of women is proof of that statement. What they demand today is to be recognized as existents by the same right as men and not to subordinate existence to life, the human being to its animality.

An existentialist perspective has enabled us, then, to understand how the biological and economic condition of the primitive horde must have led to male supremacy. The female, to a greater extent than the male, is the prey of the species; and the human race has always sought to escape its specific destiny. The support of life became for man an activity and a project through the invention of the tool; but in maternity woman remained closely bound to her body, like an animal. It is because humanity calls itself in question in the matter of living—that is to say, values the reasons for living above mere life—that, confronting woman, man assumes mastery. Man's design is not to repeat himself in time: it is to take control of the instant and mould the future. It is male activity that in creating values has made of existence itself a value; this activity has prevailed over the confused forces of life; it has subdued Nature and Woman. We must now see how this situation has been perpetuated and how it has evolved through the ages. What place has humanity made for this portion of itself which, while included within it, is defined as the Other? What rights have been conceded to it? How have men defined it?

CHAPTER II

# EARLY TILLERS OF THE SOIL

We have just seen that woman's lot was a very hard one in the primitive horde, and doubtless there was no great effort made to compensate for the cruel disadvantages that handicapped woman. But neither was woman put upon and bullied as happened later under paternalistic auspices. No institution ratified the inequality of the sexes; indeed, there were no institutions—no property, no inheritance, no jurisprudence. Religion was neuter: worship was offered to some asexual totem.

Institutions and the law appeared when the nomads settled down on the land and became agriculturists. Man no longer limited himself to harsh combat against hostile forces; he began to express himself through the shape he imposed upon the world, to think of the world and of himself. At this point the sexual differentiation was reflected in the structure of the human group, and it took on a special form. In agricultural communities woman was often clothed in extraordinary prestige. This prestige is to be explained essentially by the quite new importance that the child acquired in a civilization based on working the soil. In settling down on a certain territory, men established ownership of it, and property appeared in a collectivized form. This property required that its possessors provide a posterity, and maternity became a sacred function.

Many tribes lived under a communal regime, but this does not mean that the women belonged to all the men in common —it is hardly held today that promiscuity was ever the general practice—but men and women experienced religious, social, and economic existence only as a group: their individuality remained a purely biological fact. Marriage, whatever its form—monogamy, polygamy, or polyandry—was only a secular accident, creating no mystical tie. It involved no servitude for the wife, for she was still integrated with her clan. The whole body of a clan, unified under a single totem, possessed in a mystical sense a single mana, materially the common enjoyment of a single territory. According to the process of

alienation I have already discussed, the clan found self-awareness in this territory under an objective and concrete form ; through the permanence of the land, therefore, the clan became a real unity, whose identity persisted through the passage of time.

This existentialist position alone enables us to understand the identification that has existed up to the present time between the clan, the tribe, or the family, and property. In place of the outlook of the nomadic tribes, living only for the moment, the agricultural community substituted the concept of a life rooted in the past and connected with the future. Veneration was accorded to the totemic ancestor who gave his name to the members of the clan ; and the clan took a profound interest in its own descendants, for it would achieve survival through the land that it would bequeath to them and that they would exploit. The community sensed its unity and desired a continued existence beyond the present ; it recognized itself in its children, recognized them as its own ; and in them it found fulfilment and transcendence.

Now, many primitive peoples were ignorant of the part taken by the father in the procreation of children (and in a few cases this seems to be true even today) ; they regarded children as the reincarnation of ancestral spirits that hover about certain trees or rocks, in certain sacred places, and come down and enter the bodies of women. Sometimes it was held that the woman ought not to be a virgin, so as to permit this infiltration ; but other peoples believed that it could occur as well through the nostrils or the mouth. In any case, defloration was secondary in the matter, and for reasons of a mystical nature it was rarely the prerogative of the husband.

But the mother was obviously necessary for the birth of the child ; she it was who protected and nourished the germ within her body, and therefore it was through her that the life of the clan in the visible world was propagated. Thus she came to play a role of the first importance. Very often the children belonged to their mother's clan, carried its name, and shared its rights and privileges, particularly in the use of the land held by the clan. Communal property was handed down by the women: through them ownership in the fields and harvests was assured to members of the clan, and conversely these members were destined through their mothers for this or that domain. We may suppose, then, that in a mystical sense the earth belonged to the women: they had a hold, at

once religious and legal, upon the land and its fruits. The tie between woman and land was still closer than that of ownership, for the matrilineal regime was characterized by a veritable assimilation of woman to the earth ; in both the permanence of life—which is essentially generation—was accomplished through the reproduction of its individual embodiments, its avatars.

Among the nomads procreation seemed hardly more than accidental, and the wealth of the soil remained unknown ; but the husbandman marvelled at the mystery of the fecundity that burgeoned in his furrows and in the maternal body : he realized that he had been engendered like the cattle and the crops, he wanted his clan to engender other men who would perpetuate it while perpetuating the fertility of the fields ; all nature seemed to him like a mother : the land is woman and in woman abide the same dark powers as in the earth.[1] It was for this reason in part that agricultural labour was entrusted to woman ; able to summon ancestral spirits into her body, she would also have power to cause fruits and grain to spring up from the planted fields. In both cases there was no question of a creative act, but of a magic conjuration. At this stage man no longer limited himself to gathering the products of the soil, but he did not as yet know his power. He stood hesitant between technique and magic, feeling himself passive, dependent upon Nature, which dealt out life and death at random. To be sure, he realized more or less clearly the effectiveness of the sexual act and of the techniques by which he brought the land under cultivation. Yet children and crops seemed none the less to be gifts of the gods, and the mysterious emanations from the female body were believed to bring into this world the riches latent in the mysterious sources of life.

Such beliefs are still deep-rooted and are alive today in many Indian, Australian, and Polynesian tribes. In some a sterile woman is considered dangerous for the garden, in others it is thought that the harvest will be more abundant if it is gathered by a pregnant woman ; in India naked women formerly pushed the plough around the field at night, and so on. These beliefs and customs have always taken on all the more importance because they harmonized with the practical interests of the community. Maternity dooms woman to a

[1] 'Hail, Earth, mother of men, may you be fertile in the embrace of God and may you be filled with fruits for man's use,' says an old Anglo-Saxon incantation.

sedentary existence, and so it is natural that she remain at the hearth while man hunts, goes fishing, and makes war. But among primitive peoples the gardens were small and located within the village limits, and their cultivation was a domestic task ; the use of Stone Age tools demanded no great strength. Economics and religion were at one in leaving agricultural labour to the women. As domestic industry developed, it also was their lot: they wove mattings and blankets and they made pottery. Frequently they took charge of barter ; commerce was in their hands. Through them, therefore, the life of the clan was maintained and extended ; children, flocks, crops, utensils, all the prosperity of the group, depended on their labour and their magic powers—they were the soul of the community. Such powers inspired in men a respect mingled with fear, which was reflected in their worship. In woman was to be summed up the whole of alien Nature.

As I have already said, man never thinks of himself without thinking of the Other ; he views the world under the sign of duality, which is not in the first place sexual in character. But being different from man, who sets himself up as the same, it is naturally to the category of the Other that woman is consigned ; the Other includes woman. At first she is not of sufficient importance to incarnate the Other all by herself, and so a sub-division is apparent at the heart of the Other: in the ancient cosmogonies a single element often has an incarnation that is at once male and female ; thus the Ocean (male) and the Sea (feminine) are for the ancient Babylonians the double incarnation of cosmic chaos. When woman's role enlarges, she comes to represent almost in its entirety the region of the Other. Then appear those feminine divinities through whom the idea of fecundity is worshipped. At Susa was found the oldest figure of the Great Goddess, the Great Mother with long robe and high coiffure whom in other statues we see crowned with towers. The excavations in Crete have yielded several such images. She is at times steatopygous and crouching, at times slender and standing erect, sometimes dressed and often naked, her arms pressed beneath her swelling breasts. She is the queen of heaven, a dove her symbol ; she is also the empress of hell, whence she crawls forth, symbolized in a serpent. She is made manifest in the mountains and the woods, on the sea, and in springs of water. Everywhere she creates life ; if she kills, she also revives the dead. Capricious, luxurious, cruel as

Nature, at once propitious and fearsome, she reigns over all the Aegean Archipelago, over Phrygia, Syria, Anatolia, over all western Asia. She is called Ishtar in Babylonia, Astarte among Semitic peoples, and Gaea, Rhea, or Cybele by the Greeks. In Egypt we come upon her under the form of Isis. Male divinities are subordinated to her.

Supreme idol in the far realms of heaven and hell, woman is on earth surrounded with taboos like all sacred beings, she is herself taboo; because of the powers she holds, she is looked upon as a magician, a sorceress. She is invoked in prayers, sometimes she becomes a priestess as with the Druids among the ancient Celts. In certain instances she takes part in tribal government, and may even become sole ruler. These remote ages have bequeathed to us no literature. But the great patriarchal epochs preserved in their mythology, their monuments, and their traditions the memory of the times when woman occupied a very lofty situation. From the feminine point of vew, the Brahmanic epoch shows regression from that of the *Rig-Veda,* and the latter from that of the preceding primitive stage. Bedouin women of the pre-Islamic period enjoyed a status quite superior to that assigned them by the Koran. The great figures of Niobe, of Medea, evoke an era in which mothers took pride in their children, regarding them as treasures peculiarly their own. And in Homer's poems Andromache and Hecuba had an importance that classic Greece no longer attributed to women hidden in the shadows of the gynaeceum.

These facts have led to the supposition that in primitive times a veritable reign of women existed: the matriarchy. It was this hypothesis, proposed by Bachofen, that Engels adopted, regarding the passage from the matriarchate to the patriarchate as 'the great historical defeat of the feminine sex'. But in truth that Golden Age of Woman is only a myth. To say that woman was the *Other* is to say that there did not exist between the sexes a reciprocal relation: Earth, Mother, Goddess—she was no fellow creature in man's eyes; it was *beyond* the human realm that her power was affirmed, and she was therefore *outside* of that realm. Society has always been male; political power has always been in the hands of men. 'Public or simply social authority always belongs to men,' declares Lévi-Strauss at the end of his study of primitive societies.

For the male it is always another male who is the fellow being, the other who is also the same, with whom reciprocal

relations are established. The duality that appears within societies under one form or another opposes a group of men to a group of men; women constitute a part of the property which each of these groups possesses and which is a medium of exchange between them. The mistake has come from a confusion of two forms of alterity or otherness, which are mutually exclusive in point of fact. To the precise degree in which woman is regarded as the absolute Other—that is to say, whatever her magic powers, as the inessential—it is to that degree impossible to consider her as another subject.[1] Women, therefore, have never composed a separate group set up *on its own account* over against the male grouping. They have never entered into a direct and autonomous relation with the men. 'The reciprocal bond basic to marriage is not set up between men and women, but between men and men by means of women, who are only the principal occasion for it,' says Lévi-Strauss.[2] The actual condition of woman has not been affected by the type of filiation (mode of tracing descent) that prevails in the society to which she belongs; whether the system be patrilineal, matrilineal, bilateral, or non-differentiated (the non-differentiation never being strictly adhered to), she is always under the guardianship of the males. The only question is whether the woman after marriage will remain subject to the authority of her father or of her older brother—an authority that will extend also to her children—or whether she will become subject to that of her husband. 'Woman, in herself, is never more than the symbol of her line . . . matrilineal filiation is but the authority of the woman's father or brother, which extends back to the brother's village,' to quote Lévi-Strauss again. She is only the intermediary of authority, not the one who holds it. The fact is that the relations of two groups of men are defined by the system of filiation, and not the relation between the two sexes.

In practice the actual condition of woman is not bound up with this or that type of authority. It may happen that in the

[1] This discrimination, as we shall see, has been perpetuated. The epochs that have regarded woman as the Other are those which refuse most harshly to integrate her with society by right of being human. Today she can become an *other* who is also an equal only in losing her mystic aura. The anti-feminists have always played upon this equivocation. They are glad to exalt woman as the *Other* in such a manner as to make her alterity absolute, irreducible, and to deny her access to the human *Mitsein*.

[2] *Les Structures élémentaires de la parenté.*

matrilineal system she has a very high position ; still, we must be careful to note that the presence of a woman chief or queen at the head of a tribe by no means signifies that women are sovereign therein: the accession to the throne of Catherine the Great in no way modified the lot of the Russian peasant women ; and it is no less frequent for her to live in an abject condition. Furthermore, the cases are very rare in which the wife remains living with her clan, her husband being permitted only hasty, even clandestine visits. Almost always she goes to live under her husband's roof, a fact that is enough to show the primacy of the male. 'Behind the shifting modes of filiation,' writes Lévi-Strauss, 'the persistence of the patrilocal residence bears witness to the fundamentally asymmetrical relation between the sexes that marks human society.' Since woman keeps her children with her, the result is that the territorial organization of the tribe does not correspond with its totemic organization—the former is dependent on circumstances, contingent ; the latter is rigorously established. But practically the first has the more importance, for the place where people live and work counts more than their mystical connection.

In the more widespread transitional regimes there are two kinds of authority which interlock, the one religious, the other based on the occupation and working of the land. For being only a secular institution, marriage has none the less a great social importance, and the conjugal family, although stripped of religious significance, has a vigorous life on the human plane. Even in groups where great sexual freedom exists, it is proper for the woman who brings a child into the world to be married ; she is unable to form an autonomous group, alone with her progeny. And the religious protection of her brother is insufficient: the presence of a spouse is required. He often has heavy responsibilities in regard to his children. They do not belong to his clan, but nevertheless it is he who must provide for them and bring them up. Between husband and wife, father and son, are formed bonds of cohabitation, of work, of common interests, of affection. The relations between this secular family and the totemic clan are highly complex, as is attested by the diversity of marriage rites. Originally the husband bought a wife from a strange clan, or at least there was an exchange of valuables between one clan and the other, the first handing over one of its members, the second furnishing cattle, fruits, or labour in return. But since the husband assumed

responsibility for his wife and her children, he might also receive remuneration from the bride's brothers.

The balance between mystical and economic realities is an unstable one. A man is frequently much more strongly attached to his son than to his nephews; he will prefer to assert himself as father when he is in a position to do so. And this is why every society tends to assume a patriarchal form when man's evolution brings him to the point of self-awareness and the imposition of his will. But it is important to underline the statement that even when he was still perplexed before the mysteries of Life, of Nature, and of Woman, he was never without his power; when, terrified by the dangerous magic of woman, he sets her up as the essential, it is he who poses her as such and thus he really acts as the essential in this voluntary alienation. In spite of the fecund powers that pervade her, man remains woman's master as he is the master of the fertile earth; she is fated to be subjected, owned, exploited like the Nature whose magical fertility she embodies. The prestige she enjoys in men's eyes is bestowed by them; they kneel before the Other, they worship the Goddess Mother. But however puissant she may thus appear, it is only through the conceptions of the male mind that she is apprehended as such.

All the idols made by man, however terrifying they may be, are in point of fact subordinate to him, and that is why he will always have it in his power to destroy them. In primitive societies that subordination is not recognized and openly asserted, but it has immediate existence, in the nature of the case; and it will readily be made use of once man acquires clearer self-consciousness, once he dares to assert himself and offer resistance. And as a matter of fact, even when man felt himself as something given and passive, subject to the accidents of sun and rain, he was also finding fulfilment through transcendence, through project; spirit and will were already asserting themselves against the confusedness and the fortuity of life.

The totemic ancestor, whose multiple incarnations woman assumed, was more or less distinctly a male principle under its animal or arboreal name; woman perpetuated its existence in the flesh, but her role was only nourishing, never creative. In no domain whatever did she create; she maintained the life of the tribe by giving it children and bread, nothing more. She remained doomed to immanence, incarnating only the static aspect of society, closed in upon itself.

Whereas man went on monopolizing the functions which threw open that society towards nature and towards the rest of humanity. The only employments worthy of him were war, hunting, fishing; he made conquest of foreign booty and bestowed it on the tribe; war, hunting, and fishing represented an expansion of existence, its projection towards the world. The male remained alone the incarnation of transcendence. He did not as yet have the practical means for wholly dominating Woman-Earth; as yet he did not dare to stand up against her—but already he desired to break away from her.

In my view we must seek in this desire the deep-seated reason for the celebrated custom of exogamy, which is widespread among matrilineal societies. Even if man is ignorant of his part in procreation, marriage is for him a matter of vast importance: through marriage he arrives at the dignity of man's estate, and a plot of land becomes his. He is bound to the clan through his mother, through her to his ancestors and to all that makes up his very substance; but in all his secular functions, in work, in marriage, he aspires to escape from this circle, to assert transcendence over immanence, to open up a future different from the past in which his roots are sunk. The prohibition of incest takes different forms according to the types of relationship recognized in different societies, but from primitive times to our day it keeps the same meaning: what man desires to possess is that which he *is not*, he seeks union with what appears to be *Other* than himself. The wife, therefore, should not share in the mana of the husband, she should be a stranger to him and hence a stranger to his clan. Primitive marriage is sometimes based on an abduction, real or symbolic, and surely violence done upon another is the most obvious affirmation of that one's alterity. In taking his wife by force the warrior demonstrates that he is capable of annexing the wealth of strangers and of bursting the bounds of the destiny assigned to him by birth. Wife-purchase under its various forms—payment of tribute, giving of service—if less dramatic, is of the same import.[1]

[1] We find in the thesis of Lévi-Strauss, already cited, confirmation of this idea, in somewhat different form. It appears from his study that the prohibition of incest is not at all the primal fact underlying exogamy, but rather that it reflects in negative form a positive desire for exogamy. There is no immediate reason why a woman should be unfit for intercourse with the men of her own clan; but it is socially useful for her to be a part of the exchanges through which each clan establishes reciprocal

Little by little man has acted upon his experience, and in his symbolic representations, as in his practical life, it is the male principle that has triumphed. Spirit has prevailed over Life, transcendence over immanence, technique over magic, and reason over superstition. The devaluation of woman represents a necessary stage in the history of humanity, for it is not upon her positive value but upon man's weakness that her prestige is founded. In woman are incarnated the disturbing mysteries of nature, and man escapes her hold when he frees himself from nature. It is the advance from stone to bronze that enables him through his labour to gain mastery of the soil and to master himself. The husbandman is subject to the hazards of the soil, of the germination of seeds, of the seasons ; he is passive, he prays, he waits ; that is why totemic spirits once thronged the world of man ; the peasant is subject to the caprices of these powers round about him. The workman, on the contrary, shapes his tool after his own design ; with his hands he forms it according to his project ; confronting passive nature, he overcomes her resistance and asserts his sovereign will. If he quickens his strokes on the anvil, he finishes his tool sooner, whereas nothing can hasten the ripening of grain. He comes to realize his responsibility for what he is making: his skill or clumsiness will make or break it ; careful, clever, he develops his skill to a point of perfection in which he takes pride: his success depends not upon the favour of the gods but upon himself. He challenges his fellows, he is elated with success. And if he still gives some place to rituals, he feels that exact techniques are much more important ; mystical values rank second and practical interests first. He is not fully liberated from the gods. But he sets them apart from himself as he separates himself from them ; he relegates them to their Olympian

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relations with another, instead of keeping to itself. 'Exogamy has a value that is less negative than positive . . . it forbids endogamy . . . not certainly because of any biological danger inherent in consanguineous marriage but because social benefit results from exogamous marriage.' The group should not squander for private purposes the women who constitute one of its possessions, but should use them as a means of communication; if marriage with a woman of the clan is forbidden, 'the only reason is that she is *the same* when she should (and therefore can) become *the other* . . . Women sold into slavery may be the same as those originally offered for exchange in primitive times. All that is required in either case is the *mark of otherness*, which is the result of a certain position in the social structure and not an innate characteristic'.

heaven and keeps the terrestrial domain to himself. The great god Pan begins to fade when the first hammer blow resounds and the reign of man begins.

Man learns his power. In the relation of his creative arm to the fabricated object he experiences causation: planted grain may or may not germinate, but metal always reacts in the same way to fire, to tempering, to mechanical treatment. This world of tools could be embraced within clear concepts: rational thought, logic, and mathematics could now appear. The whole concept of the universe is overthrown. The religion of woman was bound to the reign of agriculture, the reign of irreducible duration, of contingency, of chance, of waiting, of mystery; the reign of *Homo faber* is the reign of time manageable as space, of necessary consequences, of the project, of action, of reason. Even when he has to do with the land, he will henceforth have to do with it as workman; he discovers that the soil can be fertilized, that it is good to let it lie fallow, that such and such seeds must be treated in such and such a fashion. It is he who makes the crops grow; he digs canals, he irrigates or drains the land, he lays out roads, he builds temples: he creates a new world.

The peoples who have remained under the thumb of the goddess mother, those who have retained the matrilineal regime, are also those who are arrested at a primitive stage of civilization. Woman was venerated only to the degree that man made himself the slave of his own fears, a party to his own powerlessness: it was in terror and not in love that he worshipped her. He could achieve his destiny only as he began by dethroning her.[1] From then on, it was to be the male principle of creative force, of light, of intelligence, or order, that he would recognize as sovereign. By the side of the goddess mother arises a god, son or lover, who is still subordinate to her but who resembles her trait for trait and is associated with her. He also incarnates a principle of fecundity, appearing as a bull, the Minotaur, the Nile fertilizing the Egyptian lowlands. He dies in autumn and is reborn in the spring, after the wife mother, invulnerable but disconsolate, has devoted her powers to finding his body and bringing

[1] Certainly this condition is necessary, but it is not the whole story: there are patrilineal cultures that have congealed at a primitive stage; others, like that of the Mayas, that have crumbled. There is no absolute superiority or inferiority between societies of maternal or paternal authority, but only the latter have evolved technically and ideologically.

it back to life. We see this couple first appearing in Crete, and we find it again on every Mediterranean shore: in Egypt it is Isis and Horus, Astarte and Adonis in Phoenicia, Cybele and Attis in Asia Minor, and in Hellenic Greece it is Rhea and Zeus.

And then the Great Mother was dethroned. In Egypt, where the situation of woman continues to be exceptionally favourable, Nut, who incarnates the sky, and Isis, the fertile soil, spouse of the Nile, and Osiris remain goddesses of extreme importance; but nevertheless it is Ra, god of the sun, of light, and of virile force, who is supreme. In Babylon Ishtar is no more than wife of Bel-Marduk. He it is who creates all things and assures their harmony. The god of the Semites is male. When Zeus comes to power on high, Gaea, Rhea, and Cybele must abdicate. In Demeter there remains only a divinity of secondary rank, but still imposing. The Vedic gods have spouses, but the latter have no such claim to worship as the former. The Roman Jupiter knows no equal.[1]

Thus the triumph of the patriarchate was neither a matter of chance nor the result of violent revolution. From humanity's beginnings, their biological advantage has enabled the males to affirm their status as sole and sovereign subjects; they have never abdicated this position; they once relinquished a part of their independent existence to Nature and to Woman; but afterwards they won it back. Condemned to play the part of the Other, woman was also condemned to hold only uncertain power: slave or idol, it was never she who chose her lot. 'Men make the gods; women worship them,' as Frazer has said; men indeed decide whether their supreme divinities shall be females or males; woman's place in society is always that which men assign to her; at no time has she ever imposed her own law.

Perhaps, however, if productive work had remained within her strength, woman would have accomplished *with* man the

[1] It is of interest to note (according to BEGOUEN, *Journal de Psychologie,* 1934) that in the Aurignacian period one comes across numerous statuettes of women with sexual features emphasized by exaggeration: they are notable for their plump contours and for the importance given to the vulva. Moreover, one finds in the caves also isolated vulvas, coarsely carved. In the Solutrean and Magdalenian these figures disappear. In the Aurignacian, masculine statuettes are very rare and there are no representations of the male organ. In the Magdalenian one still finds a few vulvas represented and, in contrast, a large number of phalli.

conquest of nature; the human species would have made its stand against the gods through both males and females; but woman was unable to avail herself of the promised benefits of the tool. Engels gave only an incomplete explanation for her degradation: it is not enough to say that the invention of bronze and iron profoundly disturbed the equilibrium of the forces of production and that thus the inferior position of woman was brought about; this inferiority is not sufficient in itself to explain the oppression that woman has suffered. What was unfortunate for her was that while not becoming a fellow workman with the labourer, she was also excluded from the human *Mitsein*. The fact that woman is weak and of inferior productive capacity does not explain this exclusion; it is because she did not share his way of working and thinking, because she remained in bondage to life's mysterious processes, that the male did not recognize in her a being like himself. Since he did not accept her, since she seemed in his eyes to have the aspect of the *other*, man could not be otherwise than her oppressor. The male will to power and expansion made of woman's incapacity a curse.

Man wished to exhaust the new possibilities opened up by the new techniques: he resorted to a servile labour force, he reduced his fellow man to slavery. The work of the slaves being much more effective than what woman could do, she lost the economic role she had played in the tribe. And in his relation to the slave the master found a much more radical confirmation of his sovereignty than in the limited authority he held over woman. Being venerated and feared because of her fecundity, being *other* than man and sharing the disturbing character of the *other*, woman in a way held man in dependence upon her, while being at the same time dependent upon him; the reciprocity of the master-slave relation was what she *actually* enjoyed, and through that fact she escaped slavery. But the slave was protected by no taboo, he was nothing but a man in servitude, not different but inferior: the dialectical expression of his relation to his master was to take centuries to come into existence. In organized patriarchal society the slave was only a beast of burden with a human face; the master exercised tyrannical authority, which exalted his pride—and he turned against woman. Everything he gained he gained against her; the more powerful he became, the more she declined.

In particular, when he became owner of the land,[1] he

[1] See Part I, chap. III.

claimed also ownership of woman. Formerly he was *possessed* by the mana, by the land; now he *has* a soul, *owns* certain lands; freed from *Woman,* he now demands for himself a woman and a posterity. He wants the work of the family, which he uses to improve his fields, to be totally *his,* and this means that the workers must belong to him: so he enslaves his wife and children. He needs heirs, in whom his earthly life will be prolonged because he hands down his property to them, and who will perform for him after his death the rites and observances needed for the repose of his soul. The cult of domestic gods is superposed upon the organization of private property, and the inheritor fulfils a function at once economic and mystic. Thus from the day when agriculture ceased to be an essentially magic operation and first became creative labour, man realized that he was a generative force; he laid claim to his children and to his crops simultaneously.[1]

In primitive times there was no more important ideological revolution than that which replaced matrilineal with patrilineal descent; thereafter the mother fell to the rank of nurse and servant, while authority and rights belonged to the father, who handed them on to his descendants. Man's necessary part in procreation was realized, but beyond this it was affirmed that only the father engenders, the mother merely nourishes the germ received into her body, as Aeschylus says in the *Eumenides*. Aristotle states that woman is only matter, whereas movement, the male principle, is 'better and more divine'. In making posterity wholly his, man achieved domination of the world and subjugation of woman. Although represented in ancient myths and in Greek drama[2] as the result of violent struggle, in truth the transition to paternal authority was, as we have seen, a matter of gradual change. Man reconquered only what he already possessed, he put the legal

[1] Just as woman was likened to the furrow, so the phallus was to the plough, and vice versa. On a picture of the Kassite epoch representing a plough are traced symbols of the generative act; later the phallus-plough identification was frequently represented in plastic art. The word *Iak* in certain Australasian languages designates both phallus and spade. There is known an Assyrian prayer addressed to a god whose 'plough has fertilized the earth'.

[2] The *Eumenides* represents the triumph of the patriarchate over the matriarchate. The tribunal of the gods declared Orestes to be the son of Agamemnon before he is the son of Clytemnestra—the ancient maternal authority and rights were dead, killed by the audacious revolt of the male!

system into harmony with reality. There was no struggle, no victory, no defeat.

But the old legends have profound meaning. At the moment when man asserts himself as subject and free being, the idea of the Other arises. From that day the relation with the Other is dramatic: the existence of the Other is a threat, a danger. Ancient Greek philosophy showed that alterity, otherness, is the same thing as negation, therefore Evil. To pose the Other is to define a Manichaeism. That is why religions and codes of law treat woman with such hostility as they do. By the time humankind reached the stage of written mythology and law, the patriarchate was definitively established: the males were to write the codes. It was natural for them to give woman a subordinate position, yet one could suppose that they would look upon her with the same benevolence as upon children and cattle—but not at all. While setting up the machinery of woman's oppression, the legislators are afraid of her. Of the ambivalent powers with which she was formerly invested, the evil aspects are now retained: once sacred, she becomes impure. Eve, given to Adam to be his companion, worked the ruin of mankind; when they wish to wreak vengeance upon man, the pagan gods invent woman; and it is the first-born of these female creatures, Pandora, who lets loose all the ills of suffering humanity. The Other—she is passivity confronting activity, diversity that destroys unity, matter as opposed to form, disorder against order. Woman is thus dedicated to Evil. 'There is a good principle, which has created order, light, and man; and a bad principle, which has created chaos, darkness, and woman,' so said Pythagoras. The Laws of Manu define woman as a vile being who should be held in slavery. Leviticus likens her to the beasts of burden owned by the patriarch. The laws of Solon give her no rights. The Roman code puts her under guardianship and asserts her 'imbecility'. Canon law regards her as 'the devil's doorway'. The Koran treats woman with utter scorn.

And yet Evil is necessary to Good, matter to idea, and darkness to light. Man knows that to satisfy his desires, to perpetuate his race, woman is indispensable; he must give her an integral place in society: to the degree in which she accepts the order established by the males, she is freed from her original taint. The idea is very clearly stated in the Laws of Manu: 'a woman assumes through legitimate marriage the very qualities of her husband, like a river that loses itself

in the ocean, and she is admitted after death to the same celestial paradise.' And similarly the Bible paints a commendatory portrait of the 'virtuous woman' (Proverbs xxi, 10-31). Christianity respects the consecrated virgin, and the chaste and obedient wife, in spite of its hatred for the flesh. As an associate in the cult, woman can even play an important religious role: the Brahmani in India, the flaminica in Rome, each is as holy as her husband. In the couple the man dominates, but the union of male and female principles remains necessary to the reproductive mechanism, to the maintenance of life, and to the order of society.

It is this ambivalence of the Other, of Woman, that will be reflected in the rest of her history; she will be subjected to man's will up to our own times. But this will is ambiguous: by complete possession and control woman would be abased to the rank of a thing; but man aspires to clothe in his own dignity whatever he conquers and possesses; the Other retains, it seems to him, a little of her primitive magic. How to make of the wife at once a servant and a companion is one of the problems he will seek to solve; his attitude will evolve through the centuries, and that will entail an evolution also in the destiny of woman.[1]

[1] We shall study that evolution in the West. The history of woman in the East, in India, in China, has been in effect that of a long and unchanging slavery. From the Middle Ages to our times, we shall centre this study on France, where the situation is typical.

## CHAPTER III

# PATRIARCHAL TIMES AND CLASSICAL ANTIQUITY

WOMAN was dethroned by the advent of private property, and her lot through the centuries has been bound up with private property: her history in large part is involved with that of the patrimony. It is easy to grasp the fundamental importance of this institution if one keeps in mind the fact that the owner transfers, alienates, his existence into his property; he cares more for it than for his very life; it overflows the narrow limits of this mortal lifetime, and continues to exist beyond the body's dissolution —the earthly and material incorporation of the immortal soul. But this survival can only come about if the property remains in the hands of its owner: it can be his beyond death only if it belongs to individuals in whom he sees himself projected, who are *his*. To cultivate the paternal domain, to render worship to the manes of the father—these together constitute one and the same obligation for the heir: he assures ancestral survival on earth and in the underworld. Man will not agree, therefore, to share with woman either his gods or his children. He will not succeed in making good his claims wholly and for ever. But at the time of patriarchal power, man wrested from woman all her rights to possess and bequeath property.

For that matter, it seemed logical to do so. When it is admitted that a woman's children are no longer hers, by the same token they have no tie with the group from whence the woman has come. Through marriage woman is now no longer lent from one clan to another: she is torn up by the roots from the group into which she was born, and annexed by her husband's group; he buys her as one buys a farm animal or a slave; he imposes his domestic divinities upon her; and the children born to her belong to the husband's family. If she were an inheritor, she would to an excessive degree transmit the wealth of her father's family to that of her husband; so she is carefully excluded from the succession. But inversely, because she owns nothing, woman does not enjoy the dignity of being a person; she herself forms a part of the patrimony of a man: first of her father, then

of her husband. Under the strictly patriarchal regime, the father can, from their birth on, condemn to death both male and female children; but in the case of the former, society usually limits his power: every normal newborn male is allowed to live, whereas the custom of exposing girl infants is widespread. Among the Arabs there was much infanticide: girls were thrown into ditches as soon as born. It is an act of free generosity on the part of the father to accept the female child; woman gains entrance into such societies only through a kind of grace bestowed upon her, not legitimately like the male. In any case the defilement of childbirth appears to be much worse for the mother when the baby is a girl: among the Hebrews, Leviticus requires in this case a purification two months longer than when a boy is brought into the world. In societies having the custom of the 'blood price', only a small sum is demanded when the victim is of female sex: her value compared to the male's is like the slave's compared with the free man's.

When she becomes a young girl, the father has all power over her; when she marries he transfers it *in toto* to the husband. Since a wife is his property like a slave, a beast of burden, or a chattel, a man can naturally have as many wives as he pleases; polygamy is limited only by economic considerations. The husband can put away his wives at his caprice, society according them almost no security. On the other hand, woman is subjected to a rigorously strict chastity. In spite of taboos, matrilineal societies permit great freedom of behaviour; prenuptial chastity is rarely required, and adultery is viewed without much severity. On the contrary, when woman becomes man's property, he wants her to be virgin and he requires complete fidelity under threats of extreme penalties. It would be the worst of crimes to risk giving inheritance rights to offspring begotten by some stranger; hence it is that the paterfamilias has the right to put the guilty spouse to death. As long as private property lasts, so long will marital infidelity on the part of the wife be regarded like the crime of high treason. All codes of law, which to this day have upheld inequality in the matter of adultery, base their argument upon the gravity of the fault of the wife who brings a bastard into the family. And if the right to take the law into his own hands has been abolished since Augustus, the Napoleonic Code still promises the indulgence of the jury to the husband who has himself executed justice.

When the wife belonged at once to the paternal clan and

to the conjugal family, she managed to retain a considerable freedom between the two series of bonds, which were confused and even in opposition, each serving to support her against the other: for example, she could often choose her husband according to her fancy, because marriage was only a secular event, not affecting the fundamental structure of society. But in the patriarchal regime she is the property of her father, who marries her off to suit himself. Attached thereafter to her husband's hearth, she is no more than his chattel and the chattel of the clan into which she has been put.

When the family and the private patrimony remain beyond question the bases of society, then woman remains totally submerged. This occurs in the Moslem world. Its structure is feudal; that is, no state has appeared strong enough to unify and rule the different tribes: there is no power to check that of the patriarchal chief. The religion created when the Arab people were warlike and triumphant professed for woman the utmost scorn. The Koran proclaims: 'Men are superior to women on account of the qualities in which God has given them pre-eminence and also because they furnish dowry for women'; woman never had either real power nor mystic prestige. The Bedouin woman works hard, she ploughs and carries burdens: thus she sets up with her spouse a bond of reciprocal dependence; she walks abroad freely with uncovered face. The veiled and sequestered Moslem woman is still today in most social strata a kind of slave.

I recall seeing in a primitive village of Tunisia a subterranean cavern in which four women were squatting: the old one-eyed and toothless wife, her face horribly devastated, was cooking dough on a small brazier in the midst of an acrid smoke; two wives somewhat younger, but almost as disfigured, were lulling children in their arms—one was giving suck; seated before a loom, a young idol magnificently decked out in silk, gold, and silver was knotting threads of wool. As I left this gloomy cave—kingdom of immanence, womb, and tomb—in the corridor leading upwards towards the light of day I passed the male, dressed in white, well groomed, smiling, sunny. He was returning from the marketplace, where he had discussed world affairs with other men; he would pass some hours in this retreat of his at the heart of the vast universe to which he belonged, from which he was not separated. For the withered old women, for the young wife doomed to the same rapid decay, there was no

universe other than the smoky cave, whence they emerged only at night, silent and veiled.

The Jews of Biblical times had much the same customs as the Arabs. The patriarchs were polygamous, and they could put away their wives almost at will; it was required under severe penalties that the young wife be turned over to her husband a virgin; in case of adultery, the wife was stoned; she was kept in the confinement of domestic duties, as the Biblical portrait of the virtuous woman proves: 'She seeketh wool, and flax . . . she riseth also while it is yet night . . . her candle goeth not out by night . . . she eateth not the bread of idleness.' Though chaste and industrious, she is ceremonially unclean, surrounded with taboos; her testimony is not acceptable in court. Ecclesiastes speaks of her with the most profound disgust: 'And I find more bitter than death the woman, whose heart is snares and nets, and her hands as bands . . . one man among a thousand have I found; but a woman among all those have I not found.' Custom, if not the law, required that at the death of her husband the widow should marry a brother of the departed.

This custom, called the *levirate,* is found among many Oriental peoples. In all regimes where woman is under guardianship, one of the problems that must be faced is what to do with widows. The most extreme solution is to sacrifice them on the tomb of the husband. But it is not true that even in India the law has ever required such holocausts; the Laws of Manu permit wife to survive husband. The spectacular suicides were never more than an aristocratic fashion. Much more frequently the widow is handed over to the heirs of the husband. The levirate sometimes takes the form of polyandry; to forestall the uncertainties of widowhood, all the brothers in a family are given as husbands to one woman, a custom that serves also to protect the tribe against the possible infertility of the husband. According to a passage in Caesar, it appears that in Brittany all the men of a family had thus in common a certain number of women.

The patriarchate was not established everywhere in this radical form. In Babylon the laws of Hammurabi acknowledged certain rights of woman; she receives a part of the paternal estate, and when she marries, her father provides a dowry. In Persia polygamy was customary; the wife was required to be absolutely obedient to her husband, chosen for her by her father when she was of marriageable age; but she was held in honour more than among most Oriental

peoples. Incest was not forbidden, and marriage was frequent between brother and sister. The wife was responsible for the education of children—boys up to the age of seven and girls up to marriage. She could receive a part of her husband's estate if the son showed himself unworthy; if she was a 'privileged spouse' she was entrusted with the guardianship of minor children and the management of business matters if the husband died without having an adult son. The marriage regulations show clearly the importance that the existence of a posterity had for the head of a family. It appears that there were five forms of marriage:[1] (1) When the woman married with her parents' consent, she was called a 'privileged spouse'; her children belonged to her husband. (2) When a woman was an only child, the first of her children was sent back to her parents to take the place of their daughter; after this the wife became a 'privileged spouse'. (3) If a man died unmarried, his family dowered and received in marriage some woman from outside, called an adopted wife; half of her children belonged to the deceased, the other half to her living husband. (4) A widow without children when remarried was called a servant wife; she was bound to assign half of the children of her second marriage to the dead husband. (5) The woman who married without the consent of her parents could not inherit from them before her oldest son, become of age, had given her as 'privileged spouse' to his own father; if her husband died before this, she was regarded as a minor and put under guardianship. The institution of the adopted wife and the servant wife enabled every man to be survived by descendants, to whom he was not necessarily connected by a blood relationship. This confirms what I was saying above; for this relationship was in a way invented by man in the wish to acquire beyond his own death an immortality on earth and in the underworld.

It was in Egypt that woman enjoyed most favourable conditions. The goddess mothers retained their prestige in becoming wives; the couple was the religious and social unit; woman seemed to be allied with and complementary to man. Her magic was so slightly hostile that even the fear of incest was overcome and sister and wife were combined without hesitation.[2] Woman had the same rights as man, the same

[1] This outline follows C. HUART, *Perse antique et la civilisation iranienne*, pp. 195-6.

[2] In certain cases, at least, the brother was bound to marry his sister.

powers in court; she inherited, she owned property. This remarkably fortunate situation was by no means due to chance: it came from the fact that in ancient Egypt the land belonged to the king and to the higher castes of priests and soldiers; private individuals could have only the use and produce of landed property—the usufruct—the land itself remained inalienable. Inherited property had little value, and apportioning it caused no difficulty. Because of the absence of private patrimony, woman retained the dignity of a person. She married without compulsion and if widowed she could remarry at her pleasure. The male practised polygamy; but though all the children were legitimate, there was only one real wife, the one who alone was associated in religion and bound to him legally; the others were only slaves without any rights at all. The chief wife did not change status in marrying: she remained mistress of her property and free to do business. When Pharaoh Bochoris established private property, woman occupied so strong a position that she could not be dislodged; Bochoris opened the era of contracts, and marriage itself became contractual.

There were three types of marriage contracts: one concerned servile marriage; the woman became the man's property, but there was sometimes the specification that he would have no other concubine; at the same time the legitimate spouse was regarded as the man's equal, and all their goods were held in common; often the husband agreed to pay her a sum of money in case of divorce. This custom led later to a type of contract particularly favourable to the wife: the husband granted to her an artificial trust. There were severe penalties against adultery, but divorce was almost free for both parties. The putting into effect of these contracts tended strongly to reduce polygamy; the women monopolized the fortunes and bequeathed them to their children, leading to the advent of a plutocratic class. Ptolemy Philopater decreed that women could no longer dispose of their property without authorization by their husbands, which made them permanent minors. But even at the time when they had a privileged status, unique in the ancient world, women were not socially the equals of men. Sharing in religion and in government, they could act as regent, but the pharaoh was male; the priests and soldiers were men; women took only a secondary part in public life; and in private life there was demanded of them a fidelity without reciprocity.

The customs of the Greeks remained very similar to the

Oriental; but they did not include polygamy. Just why is unknown. It is true that maintenance of a harem has always been a heavy expense: it was Solomon in all his glory, the sultans of *The Arabian Nights,* kings, chieftains, the rich, who could indulge themselves in the luxury of a vast seraglio; the average man was content with three or four wives; the peasant rarely had more than two. Besides—except in Egypt, where there was no special private property—regard for preserving the patrimony intact led to the bestowal on the eldest son of special rights in the paternal estate. On this account there was established a hierarchy among the wives, the mother of the chief heir being clothed in a dignity far above that of the others. If the wife had property of her own, if she had a dowry, she was for her husband a person: he was joined to her by a bond at once religious and exclusive.

On the basis of this situation, no doubt, was established the custom of recognizing only a single wife. But in point of fact the Greek citizen remained agreeably polygamous in practice, since he could satisfy his desires with the prostitutes of the city and the handmaidens of his gynaeceum. 'We have hetairas for the pleasures of the spirit,' said Demosthenes, '*pallages* (concubines) for sensual pleasure, and wives to give us sons.' The concubine replaced the wife in the master's bed when she was ill, indisposed, pregnant, or recovering from childbirth; thus there is no great difference between gynaeceum and harem. In Athens the wife was shut up in her quarters, held under severe constraint by law, and watched over by special magistrates. She remained all her life a perpetual minor, under the control of her guardian, who might be her father, her husband, the latter's heir, or, in default of these, the State, represented by public officials. These were her masters, and she was at their disposal like a commodity, the control of the guardian extending over both her person and her property. The guardian could transfer his rights at will: the father gave his daughter in marriage or into adoption; the husband could put away his wife and hand her over to a new husband. Greek law, however, assured to the wife a dowry, which was used for her maintenance and was to be restored in full if the marriage was dissolved; the law also authorized the wife in certain rare cases to ask for divorce; but these were the only guarantees granted her by society. The whole estate was, of course, bequeathed to male children, the dowry representing, not property acquired

through relationship, but a kind of contribution required of the guardian.. Yet, thanks to the custom of the dowry, the widow no longer passed like a hereditary possession into the hands of her husband's heirs: she was restored to the guardianship of her parents.

One of the problems arising in societies based on inheritance through the male line is what happens to the estate if there are no male descendants. The Greeks established the custom of the *epiclerate*: the female heir must marry her eldest relative in her father's family (genos); thus the property left to her by her father would be passed on to children belonging to the same group, the domain would remain the property of the family (genos). The *epiclere* was not a female heir—merely a means for producing a male heir. This custom put her wholly at man's mercy, since she was turned over automatically to the first-born of the males of her family, who most often turned out to be an old man.

Since the oppression of woman has its cause in the will to perpetuate the family and to keep the patrimony intact, woman escapes complete dependency to the degree in which she escapes from the family; if a society that forbids private property also rejects the family, the lot of woman in it is found to be considerably ameliorated. In Sparta the communal regime was in force, and it was the only Greek city in which woman was treated almost on an equality with man. The girls were brought up like the boys; the wife was not confined in her husband's domicile: indeed, he was allowed to visit her only furtively, by night; and his wife was so little his property that on eugenic grounds another man could demand union with her. The very idea of adultery disappeared when the patrimony disappeared; all children belonged in common to the city as a whole, and women were no longer jealously enslaved to one master; or, inversely, one may say that the citizen, possessing neither private wealth nor specific ancestry, was no longer in possession of woman. Women underwent the servitude of maternity as did men the servitude of war; but beyond the fulfilling of this civic duty, no restraint was put upon their liberty.

Along with the free women just commented on and the slaves living within the genos, there were also prostitutes in Greece. Primitive peoples practised the prostitution of hospitality—a yielding up of woman to the transient guest, which doubtless had its mystic justification—and also sacred prosti-

tution, intended to release for the common good the mysterious powers of fecundation. These customs existed in classical antiquity. Herodotus relates that in the fifth century B.C. each Babylonian woman was in duty bound once in her lifetime to yield herself to a stranger in the temple of Mylitta for money, which she contributed to the wealth of the temple; thereafter she went home to lead a chaste life. Religious prostitution has persisted to the present time among the dancing girls of Egypt and the bayaderes of India, who constitute respected castes of musicians and dancers. But usually, in Egypt, in India, in western Asia, sacred prostitution passed over into legal, mercenary prostitution, the sacerdotal class finding this traffic profitable. Even among the Hebrews there were mercenary prostitutes.

In Greece, especially along the seacoast, in the islands, and in the cities thronged with visitors, were the temples in which were to be found the 'young girls hospitable to strangers', as Pindar called them. The money they earned was destined for the religious establishment—that is, for the priests and indirectly for their maintenance. In reality, there was hypocritical exploitation—at Corinth and elsewhere—of the sexual needs of sailors and travellers, and it was already venal or mercenary prostitution in essence. It remained for Solon to make an institution of the traffic. He bought Asiatic slaves and shut them up in the 'dicterions' located near the temple of Venus at Athens, not far from the port. The management was in the hands of *pornotropoi,* who were responsible for the financial administration of the establishment. Each girl received wages, and the net profit went to the State. Afterwards private establishments, *kapaileia,* were opened, with a red priapus serving as business sign. Before long, in addition to the slaves, Greek women of low degree were taken in as boarders. The 'dicterions' were regarded as so essential that they received recognition as inviolable places of refuge. The prostitutes were persons of low repute, however; they had no social rights, their children were excused from supporting them, they had to wear a special costume of many-coloured cloth, ornamented with bouquets, and they had to dye their hair with saffron.

In addition to the women of the 'dicterions', there were also free courtesans, who can be placed in three categories: the dicteriads, much like the licensed prostitutes of today; the auletrids, dancers and flute-players; and the hetairas, women of the demi-monde, mostly from Corinth, who car-

ried on recognized liaisons with the most notable men of Greece and who played the social role of the modern 'woman of the world'. The first were recruited among freed women and Greek girls of the lower classes; they were exploited by the procurers and led a life of misery. The second were often able to get rich because of their talent as musicians; most celebrated was Lamia, mistress of an Egyptian Ptolemy, and then of his conqueror, Demetrius Poliorcetes, King of Macedonia. As for the third and last category, it is well known that several shared the glory of their lovers. Free to make disposal of themselves and of their fortunes, intelligent, cultivated, artistic, they were treated as persons by the men who found enchantment in their company. By virtue of the fact that they escaped from the family and lived on the fringes of society, they escaped also from man; they could therefore seem to him to be fellow beings, almost equals. In Aspasia, in Phryne, in Lais was made manifest the superiority of the free woman over the respectable mother of a family.

These brilliant exceptions apart, woman in Greece was reduced to semi-slavery, without even the liberty to complain. In the great classical period woman was firmly shut away in the gynaeceum; Pericles said that 'the best woman is she of whom men speak the least'. Plato aroused the raillery of Aristophanes when he advocated the admission of matrons to the administration of the Republic and proposed giving girls a liberal education. But according to Xenophon, wife and husband were strangers, and in general the wife was required to be a watchful mistress of the house, prudent, economical, industrious as a bee, a model stewardess. In spite of this modest status of woman, the Greeks were profoundly misogynous. From ancient epigrammatists to the classical writers, woman was constantly under attack, not for loose conduct—she was too severely controlled for that—and not because she represented the flesh; it was especially the burdens and discomforts of marriage that weighed on the men. We must suppose that in spite of woman's low condition she none the less held a place of importance in the house; she might sometimes disobey, and she could overwhelm her husband with scenes, tears, and nagging, so that marriage, intended to enslave woman, was also a ball and chain for man. In the figure of Xantippe are summed up all the grievances of the Greek citizen against the shrewish wife and against the adversities of married life.

In Rome it was the conflict between family and State that determined the history of woman. Etruscan society was matrilineal, and it is probable that in the time of the monarchy Rome still practised exogamy under a matrilineal regime: the Latin kings did not hand on power from one to another in the hereditary fashion. It is certainly true after the death of Tarquin patriarchal authority was established: agricultural property, the private estate—therefore the family—became the unitary basis of society. Woman was to be closely bound to the patrimony and hence to the family group. The laws even deprived her of the protection extended to Greek women; she lives a life of legal incapacity and of servitude. She was, of course, excluded from public affairs, all 'masculine' positions being severely forbidden to her; and in her civil life she was a permanent minor. She was not directly deprived of her share in the paternal heritage, but by indirect means she was prevented from exercising control of it—she was put under the authority of a guardian. 'Guardianship,' says Gaius, 'was established in the interest of the guardians themselves, so that the woman, whose presumptive heirs they are, could not rob them of the heritage by willing it to others, nor reduce it by expenditures and debts.'

The first guardian of a woman was her father; in his absence his male relatives performed this function. When a woman married, she passed into the hands of her husband; there were three types of marriage: the *conferatio*, in which the couple offered to the capitoline Jupiter a cake of wheat in the presence of the *flamen dialis*; the *coemptio*, a fictitious sale in which the plebeian father 'mancipated' his daughter to the husband; and the *usus*, the result of a year's cohabitation. All these were with '*manu*', meaning that the husband replaced the father or other guardian; his wife became like one of his daughters, and he had complete control henceforth over her person and her property. But from the time of the law of the Twelve Tables, because the Roman woman belonged at once to the paternal and the conjugal clans, conflicts arose, which were at the source of her legal emancipation. In fact, marriage with *manu* despoiled the agnate guardians. To protect these paternal relatives, a form of marriage *sine manu* came in; here the woman's property remained under the guardian's control, the husband acquired rights over her person only. Even this power was shared with her paterfamilias, who retained an absolute authority over his daughter. The domestic tribunal was empowered to settle the disputes

that could bring father and husband into conflict; such a court permitted the wife an appeal from father to husband or from husband to father; she was not the chattel of any one individual. Moreover, although the family was very powerful (as is proved by the very existence of this tribunal, independent of the public tribunals), the father and head of a family was before all a citizen. His authority was unlimited, he was absolute ruler of wife and children; but these were not his property; rather, he controlled their existence for the public good: the wife who brought children into the world and whose domestic labour often included farm work was most useful to the country and was profoundly respected.

We observe here a very important fact that we shall come upon throughout the course of history: abstract rights are not enough to define the actual concrete situation of woman; this depends in large part on her economic role; and frequently abstract liberty and concrete powers vary in inverse ratio. Legally more enslaved than the Greek, the woman of Rome was in practice much more deeply integrated in society. At home she sat in the atrium, the centre of the dwelling, instead of being hidden away in the gynaeceum; she directed the work of the slaves; she guided the education of the children, and frequently she influenced them up to a considerable age. She shared the labours and cares of her husband, she was regarded as co-owner of his property. The matron was called *domina*; she was mistress of the home, associate in religion—not the slave, but the companion of man. The tie that bound her to him was so sacred that in five centuries there was not a single divorce. Women were not restricted to their quarters, being present at meals and celebrations and going to the theatre. In the street men gave them right of way, consuls and lictors made room for them to pass. Woman played a prominent role in history, according to such legends as those of the Sabine women, Lucretia, and Virginia; Coriolanus yielded to the supplications of his mother and his wife; the law of Lucinius, sanctioning the triumph of Roman democracy, was inspired by his wife; Cornelia forged the souls of the Gracchi. 'Everywhere men rule over women,' said Cato, 'and we who govern all men are ourselves governed by our women.'

Little by little the legal status of the Rome woman was brought into agreement with her actual condition. At the time of the patrician oligarchy each head of a family was an independent sovereign within the Republic; but when the power

of the State became firmly established, it opposed the concentration of wealth and the arrogance of the powerful families. The domestic tribunal disappeared before the public courts. And woman gained increasingly important rights. Four authorities had at first limited her freedom: the father and husband had control of her person, the guardian and the *manus* of her property. The State took advantage of the opposition of the father and husband in order to limit their rights: cases of adultery, divorce, and so on were to be judged in the State courts. Similarly, *manus* and guardianship were destroyed, the one by the other. For the guardian's benefit the *manus* had already been separated from marriage; later the *manus* became an expedient used by women in escaping their guardians, whether by contracting fictitious marriages or by securing complaisant guardians from the father or the State. Under the legislation of the Empire, guardianship was to be entirely abolished.

Woman also gained a positive guarantee of independence: her father was required to provide her with a dowry. This did not go back to her male relatives after dissolution of the marriage, and it never belonged to her husband; the wife could at any time demand its restitution through immediate divorce, which put the man at her mercy. According to Plautus, 'In accepting the dowry, he sold his power.' From the end of the Republic on, the mother was entitled to the respect of her children on an equality with the father; she was entrusted with the care of her offspring in case of guardianship or of bad conduct on the part of her husband. Under Hadrian, an act of the Senate conferred upon her—when she had three children and when any of them died without issue—the right to inherit from each of them intestate. And under Marcus Aurelius the evolution of the Roman family was completed: from the year 178 on, children were the heirs of their mother, triumphing over the male relatives; henceforth the family was based upon *conjunctio sanguinis* and the mother took a place of equality with the father; the daughter inherited like her brothers.

We observe in the history of Roman law, however, a tendency contradicting that which I have just described; the power of the State, while making woman independent of the family, took her back under its own guardianship; it made her legally incompètent in various ways.

Indeed, she would take on a disturbing importance if she could be at once wealthy and independent; so it was going to be necessary to take away from her with one hand what had

been yielded to her with the other. The Oppian law, forbidding luxury to Roman women, was passed at the moment when Hannibal was threatening Rome; once the danger was past, the women demanded that it be repealed. In an oration, Cato demanded its retention; but the appearance of the matrons assembled in the public square carried the day against him. Various laws, increasing in severity as the mores became more loose, were later proposed, but without much success: they hardly did more than give rise to fraud. Only the Velleian act of the Senate triumphed, forbidding women to 'intercede' for others—that is, to enter into contracts with others—which deprived her of almost every legal capacity. Thus it was just when woman was most fully emancipated that the inferiority of her sex was asserted, affording a remarkable example of the process of male justification of which I have spoken: when women's rights as daughter, wife, or sister are no longer limited, it is her equality with man, as a sex, that is denied her; 'the imbecility, the weakness of the sex' is alleged, in domineering fashion.

The fact is that the matrons made no very good use of their new liberty; but it is also true that they were not allowed to turn it to positive account. The result of these two contrary tendencies—an individualist tendency that freed woman from the family and a statist tendency that infringed upon her as an individual—was to make her situation unbalanced. She could inherit, she has equal rights with the father in regard to the children, she could testify. Thanks to the institution of the dowry, she escaped conjugal oppression, she could divorce and remarry at will; but she was emancipated only in a negative way, since she was offered no concrete employment of her powers. Economic freedom remained abstract, since it produced no political power. Thus it was that, lacking equal capacity to *act,* the Roman women *demonstrated*: they swarmed tumultuously through the city, they besieged the courts, they fomented plots, they raised objections, stirred up civil strife; in procession they sought out the statue of the Mother of Gods and bore it along the Tiber, thus introducing Oriental divinities into Rome; in the year 114 the scandal of the Vestal Virgins burst forth and their organization was suppressed.

When the collapse of the family made the ancient virtues of private life useless and outdated, there was no longer any established morality for woman, since public life and its virtues remained inaccessible to her. Women could choose be-

tween two solutions: either continue obstinately to respect the values of their grandmothers, or no longer recognize any values. At the end of the first century and the beginning of the second we see many women continuing to be the companions and associates of their husbands as they were during the Republic: Plotina shared the glory and the responsibilities of Trajan; Sabina made herself so famous through her benefactions that in her lifetime she was deified in statuary; under Tiberius, Sextia refused to survive Aemilius Scaurrus, and Pascea to survive Pomponius Labeus; Pauline opened her veins with Seneca; Pliny the Younger had made famous Arria's '*non dolet, Paete*';[1] Martial praised Claudia Rufina, Virginia, and Sulpicia as wives beyond reproach and devoted mothers. But there were many women who refused maternity and who helped to raise the divorce rate. The laws still forbade adultery, so some matrons went so far as to have themselves registered as prostitutes in order to facilitate their debauchery.[2]

Up to that time Latin literature had always treated women respectfully, but then the satirists were let loose against them. They attacked no woman in general but specifically women of that particular time. Juvenal reproached them for their lewdness and gluttony; he found fault with them for aspiring to men's occupations—they meddled in politics, plunged into the files of legal papers, disputed with grammarians and rhetoricians, went in passionately for hunting, chariot racing, fencing, and wrestling. They were rivals of the men, especially in their taste for amusement and in their vices; they lacked sufficient education to envisage higher aims; and besides, no goal was set up for them; action was still forbidden for them. The Roman woman of the old Republic had a place on earth, but she was chained to it for lack of abstract rights and economic independence; the Roman woman of the decline was the typical product of false emancipation, having only an empty liberty in a world of which man remained in fact the sole master: she was free—but for nothing.

[1] When her husband, Paetus, was in serious trouble with the authorities, Arria stabbed herself, saying: 'It does not hurt, Paetus,' which encouraged him to do likewise.—TR.

[2] Rome, like Greece, officially tolerated prostitution. There were two classes of courtesans: those who were confined in brothels, and the 'good prostitutes', those who practised their profession in freedom but were not allowed to wear the usual married woman's costume. They had some influence on fashion, dress, and the arts, but they never occupied any such lofty position as the Athenian hetairas.

CHAPTER IV

# THROUGH THE MIDDLE AGES TO EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY FRANCE

THE evolution of woman's condition was not a continuous process. When the great invasions came, all civilization was again called in question. Roman law itself came under the influence of a new ideology, Christianity; and in the following centuries the barbarians succeeded in imposing their laws. The economic, social, and political situation was turned upside down: that of woman felt the repercussion.

Christian ideology has contributed no little to the oppression of woman. Doubtless there is in the Gospel a breath of charity that extends to women as to lepers; and it was, to be sure, humble folk, slaves, and women who clung most passionately to the new law. In early Christian times women were treated with relative honour when they submitted themselves to the yoke of the Church; they bore witness as martyrs side by side with men. But they could take only a secondary place as participants in worship, the 'deaconesses' were authorized to carry out only such lay tasks as caring for the sick and aiding the poor. And if marriage was to be held to be an institution demanding mutual fidelity, it seemed obvious that the wife should be totally subordinated to her husband: through St. Paul the Jewish tradition, savagely anti-feminist, was affirmed.

St. Paul enjoined self-effacement and discretion upon women; he based the subordination of woman to man upon both the Old and the New Testaments. 'For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man.' And in another place: 'For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church . . . Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.' In a religion that holds the flesh accursed, woman becomes the devil's most fearsome temptation. Tertullian writes: 'Woman, you are the devil's

doorway. You have led astray one whom the devil would not dare attack directly. It is your fault that the Son of God had to die; you should always go in mourning and in rags.' St. Ambrose: 'Adam was led to sin by Eve and not Eve by Adam. It is just and right that woman accept as lord and master him whom she led to sin.' And St. John Chrysostom: 'Among all savage beasts none is found so harmful as woman." When the canon law was set up in the fourth century, marriage was viewed as a concession to human frailty, something incompatible with Christian perfection. 'Let us take axe in hand and cut off at its roots the fruitless tree of marriage,' wrote St. Jerome. From the time of Gregory VI, when celibacy was imposed on the priesthood, the dangerous character of woman was more severely emphasized: all the Fathers of the Church proclaimed her abjectly evil nature. St. Thomas was true to this tradition when he declared that woman is only an 'occasional' and incomplete being, a kind of imperfect man. 'Man is above woman, as Christ is above man,' he writes. 'It is unchangeable that woman is destined to live under man's influence, and has no authority from her lord.' Moreover, the canon law admitted no other matrimonial regime than the dowry scheme, which made woman legally incompetent and powerless. Not only did the masculine occupations remain closed to her, but she was forbidden to make depositions in court, and her testimony was not recognized as having weight. The emperors were affected to some extent by the influence of the Church Fathers. Justinian's legislation honoured woman as wife and mother, but held her subservient to these functions; it was not to her sex but to her situation within the family that she owed her legal incompetence. Divorce was forbidden and marriage was required to be performed in public. The mother's authority over her children was equal to the father's, and she had the same rights in their inheritances; if her husband died she became their legal guardian. The Velleian act of the Senate was modified so that in future a woman could make contracts for the benefit of a third party; but she could not contract for her husband; her dowry became inalienable—it was the patrimony of the children and she was forbidden to dispose of it.

These laws came into contact with Germanic traditions in the territories occupied by the barbarians. In peacetime the Germans had no chieftain, the family being an independent society in which woman was completely under male domination, though she was respected and had some rights. Marriage

was monogamous, and adultery was severely punished. In wartime the wife followed her husband into battle, sharing his lot in life and death, as Tacitus reports. Woman's inferiority was due to physical weakness and was not moral, and since woman could act as priestesses and prophetesses, they may have been better educated than the men.

These traditions were continued into the Middle Ages, woman being in a state of absolute dependence on father and husband. The Franks did not maintain the Germanic chastity: polgamy was practised; woman was married without her consent, and put away at her husband's caprice; and she was treated as a servant. The laws gave her strong protection from injury and insult, but only as man's property and mother of his children. As the State became powerful, the same changes occurred as in Rome: guardianship became a public charge, protecting woman, but also continuing her enslavement.

When feudalism emerged from the convulsions of the early Middle Ages, woman's position seems to have been most uncertain. Feudalism involved confusion of authority between sovereignty and property, between public and private rights and powers. This explains why woman was alternately elevated and abased under this regime. At first she had no private rights because she had no political power, and this was because the social order up to the eleventh century was founded on might alone, and the fief was property held by military force, a power not wielded by woman. Later, woman could inherit in the absence of male heirs; but her husband was guardian and exercised control over the fief and its income; she was a part of the fief, by no means emancipated.

The domain was no longer a family affair, as in the time of the Roman gens: it belonged to the suzerain; and woman also. He chose her husband, and her children belonged to him rather than to her husband, being destined to become vassals who would protect his wealth. Thus she was slave of the domain and of the master of this domain through the 'protection' of a husband imposed upon her: there have been few periods in which her lot was harder. An heiress—that meant land and a castle. At twelve or less she might be given in marriage to some baron. But more marriages meant more property, so annulments were frequent, hypocritically authorized by the Church. Pretexts were easily found in the rules against marriage between persons related in even remote degree and not necessarily by blood. Many women of the eleventh century had been thus repudiated four or five times.

If widowed, woman was expected to accept at once a new master. In the *chansons de geste* we see Charlemagne marrying in a group all the widows of his barons killed in Spain; and many epic poems tell of king or baron disposing tyrannically of girls and widows. Wives were beaten, chastised, dragged by the hair. The knight was not interested in women; his horse seemed much more valuable to him. In the *chansons de geste* young women always made the advances, but once they were married, a one-sided fidelity was demanded of them. Girls were brought up rudely, with rough physical exercises and without modesty or much education. When grown up, they hunted wild beasts, made difficult pilgrimages, defended the fief when the master was abroad. Some of these chatelaines were avaricious, perfidious, cruel, tyrannical, like the men; grim tales of their violence have come down to us. But all such were exceptions; ordinarily the chatelaine passed her days in spinning, saying her prayers, waiting on her husband, and dying of boredom.

The 'knightly love' appearing in the Midi in the twelfth century may have softened woman's lot a little, whether it arose from the relations between the lady and her young vassals or from the cult of the Virgin or from the love of God in general. There is doubt that the courts of love ever really existed, but it is sure that the Church exalted the cult of the mother of the Redeemer to such a degree that we can say that in the thirteenth century God had been made woman. And the life of ease of noble dames permitted conversation, polite manners, and poetry to flourish. Learned women, such as Eleanor of Aquitaine and Blanche of Navarre, supported poets, and a widespread cultural flowering lent to woman a new prestige. Knightly love has often been regarded as platonic; but the truth is that the feudal husband was guardian and tyrant, and the wife sought an extra-marital lover; knightly love was a compensation for the barbarism of the official mores. As Engels remarks: 'Love, in the modern sense of the word, appeared in antiquity only outside the bounds of official society. The point where antiquity stopped in its search for sexual love is just where the Middle Ages started: adultery.' And that is indeed the form that love will assume as long as the institution of marriage lasts.

But it was not knightly love nor was it religion but quite other causes that enabled woman to gain some ground as feudalism came to an end. As royal power increased, the feudal lord gradually lost much of his authority, including

that of deciding vassal marriages, and the right to use the wealth of his wards. When the fief contributed money instead of military service to the crown, it became a mere patrimony and there was no longer any reason why the two sexes should not be treated on a footing of equality. In France the unmarried or widowed woman had all the rights of man; as proprietor of a fief, she administered justice, signed treaties, decreed laws. She even played a military role, commanding troops and joining combat: there were female soldiers before Joan of Arc, and if the Maid caused astonishment, she did not scandalize.

So many factors combine against women's independence, however, that they never seem to have been all abolished at once. Physical weakness no longer counted, but in the case of married women subordination remained useful to society. Hence marital authority survived the passing of feudalism. We see the same paradox that exists today: the woman who is most fully integrated in society has the fewest privileges. Under civil feudalism marriage remained as it was under military feudalism: the husband was still his wife's guardian. When the bourgeoisie arose, it followed the same laws; the girl and the widow have the rights of man; but in marriage woman was a ward, to be beaten, her conduct watched over in detail, and her fortune used at will. The interests of property require among nobility and bourgeoisie that a single administrator take charge. This could be a single woman; her abilities were admitted; but from feudal times to our days the married woman has been deliberately sacrificed to private property. The richer the husband, the greater the dependence of the wife; the more powerful he feels socially and economically, the more authoritatively he plays the paterfamilias. On the contrary, a common poverty makes the conjugal tie a reciprocal tie. Neither feudalism nor the Church freed woman. It was rather in emerging from serfdom that the passage from the patriarchal to the truly conjugal family was accomplished. The serf and his wife owned nothing; they had the use of house and furnishings, but that was no reason for the man to try to be master of a wife without wealth. On the contrary, common interests brought them together and raised the wife to the rank of companion. When serfdom was abolished, poverty remained; husband and wife lived on a footing of equality in small rural communities and among the workers; in free labour woman found real autonomy because she played an economic and social part of real im-

portance. In the comedies and fables of the Middle Ages is reflected a society of workers, small merchants, and peasants in which the husband had no advantages over his wife except the strength to beat her ; but she opposed guile to force, and the pair thus lived in equality. Meanwhile the rich woman paid with her subjection for her idleness.

Woman still retained a few privileges in the Middle Ages, but in the sixteenth century were codified the laws that lasted all through the Old Regime ; the feudal mores were gone and nothing protected woman from man's wish to chain her to the hearth. The code denied woman access to 'masculine' positions, deprived her of all civil capacities, kept her, while unmarried, under the guardianship of her father, who sent her into a convent if she failed to marry later, and if she did marry put her and her property and children completely under her husband's authority. He was held responsible for her debts and conduct, and she had little direct relation with public authorities or persons who were strangers to her family. She seemed in work and in motherhood more a servant than an associate: the objects, the values, the beings she created were not her own wealth but belonged to the family, therefore to the man who was its head. In other countries woman was no better off ; her political rights were none and the mores were severe. All the European legal codes were erected on a basis of canon law, Roman law, and Germanic law—all unfavourable to woman. Every country had private property and the family and was regulated according to the demands of these institutions.

In all these countries one of the results of the 'honest woman's' enslavement to the family was the existence of prostitution. Maintained hypocritically on the fringes of society, the prostitutes played a most important part in it. Christianity poured out its scorn upon them, but accepted them as a necessary evil. Both St. Augustine and St. Thomas asserted that the suppression of prostitution would mean the disruption of society by debauch: 'Prostitutes are to a city what sewers are to a palace.' In the early Middle Ages the mores were so licentious that whores were hardly needed ; but when the bourgeois family was established and rigorous monogamy became the rule, a man had to look for pleasure outside the home.

Against prostitution the efforts of Charlemagne, and later those of Charles IX in France, and those of Maria Theresa

in Austria in the eighteenth century[1] were all alike failures. The organization of society made prostitution necessary. As Schopenhauer was to put it pompously: 'Prostitutes are human sacrifices on the altar of monogamy.' Lecky, historian of European morals, formulated the same idea somewhat differently: 'Supreme type of vice, they are the greatest guardians of virtue.' The usury of the Jews and the extra-conjugal sexuality of the prostitutes were alike denounced by Church and State; but society could not get along without financial speculation and extra-marital love; these functions were therefore assigned to wretched castes, segregated in ghettoes or in restricted quarters. The prostitutes like the Jews were obliged to wear distinctive signs on their clothing; they were helpless against the police; for most, life was difficult. But many prostitutes were free; some made a good living. As in the time of the Greek hetairas, the high life of gallantry offered more opportunities to feminine individualism than did the life of the 'honest woman'.

In France the single woman occupied a peculiar position; her independence was in startling contrast to the bondage of the wife; she was a remarkable personage. But then the mores deprived her of all that the law had bestowed; she possessed civil rights—but these were abstract and empty; she enjoyed neither economic autonomy nor social dignity; generally the old maid spent her life in the shadow of her father's family or joined others like her within the convents, where she scarcely knew any other form of liberty than disobedience and sin—just as the Roman women of the decadence found freedom only through vice. Negation was still the lot of women, since their emancipation remained negative.

In such conditions it was obviously rare for a woman to be able to act or simply to make her presence felt. In the working classes economic oppression nullified the inequality of the sexes, but it deprived the individual of all opportunity; among the nobility and the bourgeoisie the female sex as such was browbeaten: woman had only a parasitic existence; she had little education; only under exceptional circumstances could she envisage and carry out any concrete project. Queens and regents had this rare pleasure: their sovereignty lifted them above their sex. In France the Salic law forbade women to succeed to the throne; but beside their husbands, or after

[1] Casanova writes with amusing asperity about the efforts of the Empress Maria Theresa to advance morality by legislation and cites the thieving activities of 'a legion of vile spies... the Commissaries of Chastity'. (*Memoirs*, vol. III.)—Tr.

their death, they sometimes played a great role, as did, for example, St. Clotilda, St. Radegonde, and Blanche of Castile. Living in a convent made women independent of man: certain abbesses wielded great power; Héloïse gained fame as an abbess as much as for her love. From the mystical relation that bound them to God, feminine souls drew all the inspiration and the strength of a male soul; and the respect paid them by society enabled them to accomplish difficult enterprises. Joan of Arc's adventure had in it something of the miraculous, and besides it was only a brief escapade. But the story of St. Catherine of Siena is significant; in the midst of a quite normal existence she created in Siena a great reputation by her active benevolence and by the visions that testified to her intense inner life; thus she acquired the authority necessary in exhorting those condemned to death, in bringing back wanderers, and in allaying quarrels between families and cities. She had the support of a society that recognized itself in her, and thus it was that she could fulfil her mission of pacification, preaching from city to city submission to the Pope, keeping up extensive correspondence with bishops and rulers, and in the end being chosen by Florence as ambassadress to go to seek out the Pope in Avignon. Queens by divine right, and saints by their dazzling virtues, were assured a social support that enabled them to act on an equality with men. From other women, in contrast, only a modest silence was called for.

On the whole, men in the Middle Ages held a rather unfavourable opinion of women. The court poets, to be sure, exalted love; in the *Roman de la Rose* young men were urged to devote themselves to the service of the ladies. But opposed to this literature (inspired by that of the troubadours) were the writings of bourgeois inspiration, which attacked women with malignancy: fables, comedies, and lays charged them with laziness, coquetry, and lewdness. Their worst enemies were the clerics, who laid the blame on marriage. The Church had made it a sacrament and yet had forbidden it to the Christian *élite*: there lay a contradiction which was at the source of the 'quarrel of women'. Various clerics wrote 'lamentations' and diatribes about woman's failings, the martyrdom of man in marriage, and so on; and their opponents tried to prove woman's superiority. This quarrel went on through the fifteenth century, until for the first time we see a woman take up her pen in defence of her sex when Christine de Pisan made a lively attack on the

clerics in her *Epitre au Dieu d'Amour*. Later she maintained that if little girls were as well taught, they would 'understand the subtleties of all the arts and sciences' as well as boys. The truth of the matter was that this dispute concerned women only indirectly. No one dreamed of demanding for them a social role different from the one they had. It was rather a matter of contrasting the life of the cleric with the married state; that is to say, it was a male problem raised by the Church's ambiguous attitude in regard to marriage. This conflict Luther solved by refusing to accept the celibacy of priests. The situation of woman was not affected by that literary war; the 'quarrel' was a secondary phenomenon reflecting social attitudes but not changing them.

Woman's legal status remained almost unchanged from the beginning of the fifteenth century to the nineteenth, but in the privileged classes her actual situation did improve. The Italian Renaissance was an individualistic epoch favourable for the emergence of strong personalities, regardless of sex. Women were powerful sovereigns, military fighters and leaders, artists, writers, and musicians. Most of these women of distinction were courtesans, free in spirit, manners, and finances, and their crimes and orgies are legendary. In later centuries the same licence marked those women of rank or fortune who could escape the harsh common morality of the times. Apart from queens—Catherine de Medici, Elizabeth, Isabella—and such saints as Theresa and Catherine, who showed what women could achieve under favourable circumstances, the positive accomplishments of women were few, for education and other advantages were largely denied them through the sixteenth century.

In the seventeenth century women of leisure applied themselves to arts and letters, playing an important part in the salons as culture spread in higher social levels. In France Mme de Rambouillet, Mme de Sévigné, and others enjoyed vast renown, and elsewhere Queen Christine, Mlle de Schurman, and others were similarly celebrated. Through such qualities and prestige, women of rank or reputation began to penetrate into the world of men, finally showing in the person of Mme de Maintenon how great an influence can be exerted in affairs of state by an adroit woman, working behind the scenes. And a few personalities escaped from the bourgeois repression to make their mark in the world; a hitherto un-

known species appeared: the actress. The first woman was seen on the stage in 1545. Even at the beginning of the seventeenth century most actresses were actors' wives, but later they became independent in career as in private life. The courtesan attained her most accomplished incarnation in Ninon de Lenclos, who carried her independence and liberty to the highest extreme then permitted to a woman.

In the eighteenth century woman's freedom continued to increase. The mores were still strict: the young girl got only a sketchy education; and she was married off or sent into a convent without being consulted. The rising middle class imposed a strict morality upon wives. But women of the world led extremely licentious lives, and the upper middle class was contaminated by such examples; neither the convent nor the home could contain woman. Once again, for the majority this liberty remained abstract and negative: there was little more than the search for pleasure. But the intelligent and ambitious created opportunities. The salon took on new splendour; women protected and inspired the writer and made up his public; they studied philosophy and science and set up laboratories of physics and chemistry. In politics the names of Mme de Pompadour and Mme du Barry indicate woman's power; they really controlled the State. Actresses and women of gallantry enjoyed vast renown. Thus throughout the Old Regime the cultural sphere was the one most accessible to women who attempted to do something. Yet none ever reached the heights of a Dante or a Shakespeare, a fact that is explained by the general mediocrity of their situation. Culture was never an attribute of any but the feminine *élite*, never of the mass; and it is often from the mass that masculine genius has arisen. Even the privileged were surrounded with obstacles, and while nothing hindered the flights of a St. Theresa or a Catherine the Great, a thousand circumstances conspired against the woman writer. In *A Room of One's Own* Virginia Woolf contrasts the meagre and restricted life of an imaginary sister of Shakespeare with his life of learning and adventure. It was only in the eighteenth century that a middle-class woman, Mrs. Aphra Behn, a widow, earned her living by her pen like a man. Others followed her example, but even in the nineteenth century they were often obliged to hide. They did not have even 'a room of their own'; that is to say, they did not enjoy that material independence which is one of the necessary conditions for inner liberty. In England,

Virginia Woolf remarks, women writers have always aroused hostility.

In France things were somewhat more favourable, because of the alliance between the social and the intellectual life, but, in general, opinion was hostile to 'bluestockings'. From the Renaissance on, women of rank and of wit, with Erasmus and other men, wrote in defence of women. Marguerite of Navarre did most for the cause, proposing, in opposition to licentious mores, an ideal of sentimental mysticism and of chastity without prudery that would reconcile marriage with love for the honour and happiness of women. The enemies of woman were not silent, of course. They revived the old arguments of the Middle Ages, and published *Alphabets* with a fault of woman for every letter. A libertine literature—*Cabinet Satyrique* and the like—arose to attack feminine follies, while the religious cited St. Paul, the Church Fathers, and Ecclesiastes for woman's disparagement.

The very successes of women aroused new attacks against them: the affected women called *précieuses* alienated public opinion; the *Précieuses ridicules* and *Femmes savantes* were applauded, though Molière was no enemy of women: he sharply attacked enforced marriage, demanding freedom of sentiment for the young girl and respect and independence for the wife. Bossuet preached against woman, and Boileau wrote satires, arousing fiery defenders of the sex. Poulain de la Barre, the leading feminist of the time, published in 1673 *De l'egalité des deux sexes*. Men, he thought, used their superior strength to favour their own sex, and women acquiesced by habit in their dependence. They had never had a fair chance—neither liberty nor education. Thus they could not be judged by past performance, he argued, and nothing indicated that they were inferior to men. He demanded real education for women.

The eighteenth century was also divided in the matter. Some writers tried to prove that woman had no immortal soul. Rousseau dedicated woman to husband and to maternity, thus speaking for the middle class. 'Women's entire education should be relative to men,' he said; '. . . woman was made to yield to man and to put up with his injustice.' The democratic and individualist ideal of the eighteenth century, however, was favourable to women; to most philosophers they seemed to be human beings equal to those belonging to the stronger sex. Voltaire denounced the injustice of woman's lot. Diderot felt that her inferiority had been

largely *made* by society. Montesquieu believed paradoxically that 'it is against reason and nature that women be in control of the home . . . not at all that they govern an empire'. Helvétius showed that the absurdity of woman's education is what creates the inferiority of woman. But it was Mercier who almost alone, in his *Tableau de Paris,* waxed indignant at the misery of working-women and thus opened the fundamental question of feminine labour. Condorcet wanted women to enter political life, considering them equal to man if equally educated. 'The more women have been enslaved by the laws,' he said, 'the more dangerous has been their empire . . . It would decline if it were less to women's interest to maintain it, if it ceased to be their sole means of defending themselves and escaping from oppression.'

## CHAPTER V

# SINCE THE FRENCH REVOLUTION: THE JOB AND THE VOTE

It might well have been expected that the Revolution would change the lot of woman. It did nothing of the sort. That middle-class Revolution was respectful of middle-class institutions and values and it was accomplished almost exclusively by men. It is important to exphasize the fact that throughout the Old Regime it was the women of the working classes who as a sex enjoyed most independence. Woman had the right to manage a business and she had all the legal powers necessary for the independent pursuit of her calling. She shared in production as seamstress, laundress, burnisher, shopkeeper, and so on; she worked either at home or in small places of business; her material independence permitted her a great freedom of behaviour: a woman of the people could go out, frequent taverns, and dispose of her body as she saw fit almost like a man; she was her husband's associate and equal. It was on the economic, not on the sexual plane that she suffered oppression. In the country the peasant woman took a considerable part in farm labour; she was treated as a servant; frequently she did not eat at the table with her husband and sons, she slaved harder than they did, and the burdens of maternity added to her fatigue. But as in ancient agricultural societies, being necessary to man she was respected by him; their goods, their interests, their cares were all in common; she exercised great authority in the home. These are the women who, out of the midst of their hard life, might have been able to assert themselves and demand their rights; but a tradition of timidity and of submissiveness weighed on them. The *cahiers* of the States-General contained but few feminine claims, and these were restricted to keeping men out of women's occupations. And certainly women were to be seen beside their men in demonstrations and riots; these women went to seek at Versailles 'the baker, his wife, and his little journeyman'. But it was not the common people who led the Revolution and enjoyed its fruits.

As for the middle-class women, some ardently took up the cause of liberty, such as Mme Roland and Lucile Desmoulins. One of them who had a profound influence on the course of events was Charlotte Corday when she assassinated Marat. There was some feminist agitation. Olympe de Gouges proposed in 1789 a 'Declaration of the Rights of Woman', equivalent to the 'Declaration of the Rights of Man', in which she asked that all masculine privilege be abolished; but she perished before long on the scaffold. Short-lived journals appeared, and fruitless efforts were made by a few women to undertake political activities.

In 1790 the right of the eldest and the masculine prerogative in inheritance were abolished; girls and boys became equals in this respect. In 1792 a law was passed establishing divorce and thus relaxing matrimonial bonds. But these were only insignificant victories. Middle-class women were too well integrated in the family to feel any definite solidarity as a sex; they did not constitute a separate caste capable of imposing claims: economically they led a parasitic existence. Thus it was that while women who, in spite of their sex, could have taken part in events were prevented from doing so on account of their class, those belonging to the active class were condemned to stand aside as being women. When economic power falls into the hands of the workers, then it will become possible for the working-woman to win rights and privileges that the parasitic woman, noble or middle-class, has never obtained.

During the Revolution woman enjoyed a liberty that was anarchic. But when society underwent reorganization, she was firmly enslaved anew. From the feminist point of view, France was ahead of other countries; but unfortunately for the modern Frenchwoman, her status was decided during a military dictatorship; the Code Napoléon, fixing her lot for a century, greatly retarded her emancipation. Like all military men, Napoleon preferred to see in woman only a mother; but as heir to a bourgeois revolution, he was not one to disrupt the structure of society and give the mother pre-eminence over the wife. He forbade the investigation of paternity; he set stern conditions for the unwed mother and the natural child. The married woman herself, however, did not find refuge in her dignity as mother; the feudal paradox was perpetuated. Girl and wife were deprived of the attribute of citizenship, which prevented them from practising law and acting as guardian. But the celibate woman, the spinster,

enjoyed full civil powers, while marriage preserved the old dependency. The wife owed *obedience* to her husband; he could have her condemned to solitary confinement for adultery and get a divorce from her; if he killed her, caught in the act, he was excusable in the eyes of the law; whereas the husband was liable to penalty only if he brought a concubine into the home, and it was in this case only that the wife could obtain a divorce from him. The man decided where to live and had much more authority over the children than did the wife; and, except where the wife managed a commercial enterprise, his authorization was necessary for her to incur obligations. Her person and property were both under rigorous marital control.

During the nineteenth century jurisprudence only reinforced the rigours of the Code. Divorce was abolished in 1826, and was not restored until 1884, when it was still very difficult to obtain. The middle class was never more powerful, but it was uneasy in its authority, mindful of the menaces implied in the industrial revolution. Woman was declared made for the family, not for politics; for domestic cares and not for public functions. Auguste Comte declared that there were radical differences, physical and moral, between male and female which separated them profoundly, especially in the human race. Femininity was a kind of 'prolonged infancy' that set woman aside from 'the ideal of the race' and enfeebled her mind. He foresaw the total abolition of female labour outside the home. In morality and love woman might be set up as superior; but man acted, while she remained in the home without economic or political rights.

Balzac expressed the same ideal in more cynical terms. In the *Physiologie du mariage* he wrote: 'The destiny of woman and her sole glory are to make beat the hearts of men . . . she is a chattel and properly speaking only a subsidiary to man.' Here he speaks for the anti-feminist middle class, in reaction against both eighteenth-century licence and the threatening progressive ideas of the time. Balzac showed that bourgeois marriage where love is excluded naturally leads to adultery, and he exhorted husbands to keep a firm rein, deny their wives all education and culture, and keep them as unattractive as possible. The middle class followed this programme, confining women to the kitchen and the home, closely watching their behaviour, keeping them wholly dependent. In compensation they were held in honour and treated with the most exquisite politeness. 'The married woman is a

slave whom one must be able to set on a throne,' said Balzac. She must be yielded to in trifles, given first place; instead of making her carry burdens as among primitives one must rush forward to relieve her of any painful task and of all care—and at the same time of all responsibility. Most bourgeois women accepted this gilded confinement, and the few who complained were unheard. Bernard Shaw remarks that it is easier to put chains on men than to remove them, if the chains confer benefits. The middle-class woman clung to her chains because she clung to the privileges of her class. Freed from the male, she would have to work for a living; she felt no solidarity with working-women, and she believed that the emancipation of bourgeois women would mean the ruin of her class.

The march of history, however, was not stopped by such obstinate resistance; the coming of the machine destroyed landed property and furthered the emancipation of the working class along with that of women. All forms of socialism, wresting woman away from the family, favour her liberation: Plato envisioned a communal regime and promised women an autonomy in it such as they enjoyed in Sparta. With the utopian socialisms of Saint-Simon, Fourier, and Cabet was born the utopia of the 'free woman'; the slavery of worker and of woman was to be abolished, for women like men were human beings. Unfortunately this reasonable idea did not prevail in the school of Saint-Simonism. Fourier, for example, confused the emancipation of women with the rehabilitation of the flesh, demanding for every individual the right to yield to the call of passion and wishing to replace marriage with love; he considered woman not as a person but only in her amorous function. Cabet promised the complete equality of the sexes, but he restricted woman's share in politics. Others demanded better education for women rather than emancipation. The lofty notion of woman the regenerating influence persisted through the nineteenth century and appears in Victor Hugo. But woman's cause was rather discredited by the ineptitude of woman's partisans. Clubs, magazines, delegations, movements like 'Bloomerism' —all went down in ridicule. The most intelligent women of the time, like Mme de Staël and George Sand, remained apart from these movements while fighting their own battles for freedom. But feminism was favoured in general by the reform movement of the nineteenth century because it sought justice in equality. Proudhon was a remarkable exception. He

broke the alliance between feminism and socialism, relegating the honest woman to the home and to dependence on the male, and attempting to demonstrate her inferiority. 'Housewife or harlot' was the choice he offered. But like all anti-feminists he addressed ardent litanies to 'the true woman', slave and mirror of the male. In spite of this devotion, he was unable to make his own wife happy: the letters of Mme Proudhon are one long lament.

These theoretical debates did not affect the course of events: rather they were a hesitant reflection of things taking place. Woman regained an economic importance that had been lost since prehistoric times, because she escaped from the hearth and assumed in the factory a new part in production. It was the machine that made possible this upheaval, for the difference in physical strength between male and female workers was to a large extent annulled. As the swift growth of industry demanded a larger working force than the males alone could furnish, the collaboration of women became necessary. That was the grand revolution of the nineteenth century, which transformed the lot of woman and opened for her a new era. Marx and Engels gauged its whole range, and they promised women a liberation implied in that of the proletariat. In fact, 'woman and the worker have this in common: that they are both oppressed,' said Bebel. And both would escape together from oppression, thanks to the importance their work would take on through technological evolution. Engels showed that the lot of woman has been closely tied to the history of private property; a calamity put the patriarchate in place of the matrilineal regime and enslaved woman to the patrimony. But the industrial revolution was the counterpart of that loss of rights and would lead to feminine emancipation. His conclusion has already been quoted (page 74).

At the beginning of the nineteenth century woman was more shamefully exploited than were male workers. Labour at home constituted what the English called the 'sweating system'; in spite of constant toil, the working-woman did not earn enough to satisfy her needs. Jules Simon in *L'Ouvière* and even the conservative Leroy-Beaulieu in *Le Travail des femmes au XIX^e^*, published in 1873, denounced odious abuses; the latter says that more than two hundred thousand women workers in France earned less than fifty centimes a day. It is understandable that they made haste to get out into the factories; besides, it was not long

before nothing was left to do outside the workshops except needlework, laundering, and housework—all slave's work, earning famine wages. Even lacemaking, millinery, and the like were monopolized by the factories. By way of compensation, there were large opportunities for employment in the cotton, wool, and silk industries; women were used especially in spinning- and weaving-mills. The employers often preferred them to men. 'They do better work for less pay.' This cynical formula lights up the drama of feminine labour. For it is through labour that woman has conquered her dignity as a human being; but it was a remarkably hard-won and protracted conquest.

Spinning and weaving were done under lamentably unhygienic conditions. 'In Lyon,' wrote Blanqui, 'in the lace workshops some of the women are compelled to work almost hanging on straps while they use both hands and feet.' In 1831 the silk workers laboured in summer from three o'clock in the morning until dark, and in winter from five to eleven at night, seventeen hours a day, 'in workshops that were often unwholesome and where the sunlight never penetrated,' as Norbert Truquin said. 'Half of these young girls became consumptive before finishing their apprenticeship. When they complained, they were accused of putting on airs.'[1]

Moreover, the male employees took advantage of the young working-girls. 'To attain their ends, they made use of the most shocking means: want and hunger,' said the anonymous author of the *Vérité sur les événements de Lyon*. Sometimes women did farm work in addition to their labour at the factory. They were cynically exploited. In a note in *Das Kapital* Marx relates the following: 'The manufacturer, Mr. E., informed me that he employed women only at his power looms, that he gave preference to married women and among them to those who had families at home to support, because these were more attentive and docile than the unmarried and had to work to the very end of their strength in order to obtain the necessaries of life for their families.' And Marx adds: 'Thus it is that woman's true qualities are warped to her disadvantage, and all the moral and delicate elements in her nature become the means for enslaving her and making her suffer.' Summing up Marx and commenting on Bebel, G. Derville wrote: 'Pet or beast of burden: such is woman almost exclusively today. Supported by man when she does

[1] N. TRUQUIN, *Mémoires et aventures d'un prolétaire*. Quoted from E. DOLLEANS, *Histoire du mouvement ouvrier*, vol. I.

not work, she is still supported by him when she works herself to death.' The situation of the working-woman was so deplorable that Sismondi and Blanqui demanded that women be denied employment in the workrooms. The reason for their condition was in part because women at first did not know how to defend themselves and organize themselves in unions. Women's 'associations' dated from 1848, and at the beginning these were associations of industrial workers. The movement advanced very slowly, as these figures show:

In 1905, there were 69,405 women out of 781,392 unionized workers; in 1908, 88,906 out of 957,120; in 1912, 92,336 out of 1,064,413.

In 1920, there were 329,016 working-women and female employees unionized out of 1,580,967 workers; and among women farm labourers only 36,193 unionized out of a total of 1,083,957. In all, there were 292,000 women unionized out of a total of 3,076,585 union workers. It was a tradition of resignation and submission, a lack of solidarity and collective consciousness, that left them thus disarmed before the new opportunities that were opening up for them.

The result of this attitude was that female labour was slowly and tardily regulated. Only in 1874 did the law intervene; and yet, in spite of the campaigns waged under the Empire, there were only two provisions concerning women: one forbade night work for female minors and required that they be allowed to rest on Sundays and holidays, and their workday was limited to twelve hours; as for women over twenty-one, no more was done than to forbid underground labour in mines and quarries. The first charter for feminine labour was dated November 2nd, 1892; it forbade night work and limited the factory day; but it left the door open for all kinds of evasion. In 1900 the day was limited to ten hours; in 1905 the weekly day of rest was made obligatory; in 1907 the working-woman was granted free handling of her income; in 1909 leave with pay was guaranteed to women for childbirth; in 1911 the provisions of 1892 were strongly reasserted; in 1913 the periods of rest before and after childbirth were regulated in detail, and dangerous and excessive forms of labour were forbidden. Little by little social legislation was set up and feminine labour was surrounded with hygienic precautions: chairs were required for shop-assistants, long hours at outside displays were forbidden, and so on. The International Labour Office led to international conventions

of the sanitary conditions of women's labour, leave to be granted for pregnancy, and so forth.

A second consequence of the resigned inertia of female workers appeared in the wages with which they had to be satisfied. The phenomenon of low wages for women has been variously explained, and it is due to a complex of factors. It is not enough to say that women's needs are less than those of men: that is only justification by afterthought. The truth is, rather, that women, as we have seen, were unable to defend themselves against their exploiters; they had to meet the competition of the prisons, which threw on the market products fabricated without expense for labour; and they competed with one another. It must be remarked in addition that woman was seeking emancipation through labour in a society in which the family continued to exist: tied to her father's or her husband's hearth, she was most often satisfied to bring extra money into the family exchequer; she worked outside the family, but for it; and since the working-woman did not have to provide for the whole of her needs, she was led to accept remuneration far below what a man required. Since a significant number of women were thus content with depreciated wages, the pay of women in general was of course set at a level most advantageous to the employer.

The woman worker in France, according to a study made in the years 1889-93, received only half the pay of a man for a day's work equal to that of a man. According to the investigation of 1908, the highest hourly wages of workers at home did not exceed twenty centimes per hour and went as low as five centimes; it was impossible for a woman thus exploited to live without charity or a protector. In America in 1918 a woman got only half a man's wage. At about this time in the German mines a woman got approximately twenty-five per cent less than a man for digging the same amount of coal. Between 1911 and 1943 women's wages in France were raised a little more rapidly than the men's, but they remained definitely lower.

If employers warmly welcomed women because of the low wages they would accept, this same fact gave rise to opposition from the male workers. Between the cause of the proletariat and that of women there was no such immediate solidarity as Bebel and Engels claimed. The problem was presented in somewhat the same way as that of the Negro labourer in the United States. The most oppressed minorities

of a society are readily used by the oppressors as a weapon against the whole class to which they belong; thus these minorities seem to their class at first to be enemies, and a more profound comprehension of the situation is needed in order that the interests of blacks and whites, of women workers and men workers, may achieve unity instead of being opposed to each other. It is understandable that male workers at first saw a formidable danger in this cut-rate competition and that they exhibited hostility to it. Only when women have been integrated into the life of trade-unionism have they been able to defend their own interests and cease endangering those of the working class as a whole.

Despite all these difficulties, progress continued in the field of female labour. In 1900 there were still 900,000 home workers in France making clothes, leather goods, funeral wreaths, bags, beadwork, and novelties; but the number has subsequently diminished considerably. In 1906, 42 per cent of women of working age (between eighteen and sixty) were employed in farming, industry, business, banking, insurance, office work, and the learned professions. According to a census taken just before the last war, we find that of all women from eighteen to sixty, about 42 per cent in France are workers, 37 per cent in Finland, 34.2 in Germany, 27.7 in India, 26.9 in England, 19.2 in Holland, and 17.7 per cent in the United States. But in France and India the figures are high because of the importance of rural labour. Outside the peasantry, there were in France in 1940 about 500,000 female heads of businesses, 1,000,000 women employees, 2,000,000 women workers, and 1,500,000 self-employed or unemployed women. Among the workers there were 650,000 domestics; 1,200,000 worked in the finishing industries (44,000 in textiles, 315,000 in clothing, 380,000 in home dressmaking). Regarding women in commerce, the learned professions, and the public services, France, England, and the United States are of about the same rank.

One of the basic problems of woman, as we have seen, is the reconciliation of her reproductive role and her part in productive labour. The fundamental fact that from the beginning of history doomed woman to domestic work and prevented her taking part in the shaping of the world was her enslavement to the generative function. In female animals there is a physiological and seasonal rhythm that assures the economizing of their strength; in women, on the contrary, between puberty and the menopause nature sets no limits to

the number of her pregnancies. Certain civilizations forbid early marriage, and it is said that in certain Indian tribes a rest of at least two years between childbirth is assured to women; but in general, woman's fecundity has been unregulated for many centuries. Contraceptives have been in existence since antiquity,[1] usually to be used by the woman: potions, suppositories, vaginal tampons; but they remained the secret of prostitutes and doctors. Perhaps this secret was known to those Roman women of the decline whose sterility was attacked by the satirists. But contraceptives were practically unknown to the Middle Ages in Europe; scarcely a trace of them is to be found up to the eighteenth century. For many women life in those times was an uninterrupted succession of pregnancies; even women of easy virtue paid for their licentious lovemaking by frequent childbearing.

At certain epochs man has strongly felt the need to reduce the size of the population; but at the same time nations have feared becoming weak. In times of crisis and misery the birth rate may have been reduced by late marriage, but it remained the general rule to marry young and have as many children as the woman could produce; infant mortality alone reduced the number of living children. As early as the seventeenth century the Abbé de Pure[2] protested against the 'love dropsy' to which women were condemned; and Mme de Sévigné advised her daughter to avoid too frequent pregnancies. But it was in the eighteenth century that Malthusianism developed in France. First the wealthy classes, then the population generally found it reasonable to limit the number of children according to the means of the parents, and contraceptive measures began to be used. In 1778 the demographer

[1] 'The earliest known reference to birth-control methods appears to be an Egyptian papyrus of about 2000 B.C., which recommends application in the vagina of a bizarre mixture of crocodile excrement, honey, soda, and a gummy substance,' according to P. ARIES, *Histoire des populations françaises*. [In NORMAN HIMES'S *Medical History of Contraception* (1936), the date of this papyrus, found at Kahun in 1889, is given as about 1850 B.C. Himes presents photographs of this historic document and discusses the chemical nature of the substances mentioned.—TR.] Persian physicians at the time of the Middle Ages knew thirty-one recipes, of which only nine were to be used by the male. Soranos, at the time of Hadrian, prescribed that the woman who did not wish to conceive should, at the time of ejaculation, 'hold her breath, draw her body back a little so that the sperm could not penetrate into the *os uteri*, rise immediately, squat down, and bring on sneezing'.

[2] In the *Précieuse* (1656).

Moreau wrote: 'Rich women are not the only ones who regard the propagation of the species as an old-fashioned imposition; already these disastrous secrets, unknown to all animals but man, have reached the country; nature is deceived even in the villages.' The practice of *coitus interruptus* spread first among the middle classes, then among country people and the workers; the already existing anti-venereal protection became a contraceptive that found wisespread use especially after the discovery of vulcanization, towards 1840.[1] In Anglo-Saxon countries 'birth control' is officially sanctioned and numerous methods have been developed for dissociating those two formerly inseparable functions: the sexual and the reproductive. Medical research in Vienna and elsewhere, in setting forth precisely the mechanism of conception and the conditions favourable to it, has indicated also the ways of avoiding it. In France contraceptive propaganda and the sale of pessaries and other supplies are forbidden; but 'birth control' is none the less widely practised.

As for abortion, it is nowhere officially sanctioned by the laws. Roman law accorded no especial protection to embryonic life; it regarded the *nasciturus* (to be born) as a part of the maternal body, not as a human being. In the period of the decline abortion seemed to be a normal practice, and even the legislator who wished to encourage childbearing did not venture to forbid it. If a wife rejected her infant against her husband's will, he could have her punished, but it was her disobedience that constituted the offence. Throughout the whole of Oriental and Greco-Roman civilization abortion was permissible.

Christianity revolutionized moral ideas in this matter by endowing the embryo with a soul; for then abortion became a crime against the fetus itself. According to St. Augustine, 'Any woman who acts in such a way that she cannot give birth to as many children as she is capable of makes herself guilty of that many murders, just as with the woman who tries to injure herself after conception.' Ecclesiastical law developed gradually, with interminable discussions on such questions as when the soul actually enters the body of the fetus. St. Thomas and others set the time of animation at about the fortieth day for males and the eightieth day for females. Different degrees of guilt were attached to abortion

[1] 'About 1930 an American firm sold twenty million protective items in one year. Fifteen American factories produced a million and a half of them per day.' (P. Ariès.)

in the Middle Ages according to when it was performed and why: 'There is a great difference between the poor woman who destroys her infant on account of the difficulty of supporting it, and her who has no aim other than hiding the crime of fornication,' said the book of penitence. An edict of Henri II in 1556 was the basis for regarding abortion as murder and punishable with death. The Code of 1791 excused the woman but punished her accomplices. In the nineteenth century the idea that abortion is murder disappeared; it was regarded rather as a crime against the State. The French law of 1810 forbade it absolutely, with heavy penalties; but physicians always practised it whenever it was a question of saving the mother's life. The law was too strict and at the end of the century few arrests were made and still fewer convictions reached. New laws were passed in 1932 and 1939, with some variations in the penalties; and in 1941 abortion was decreed a crime against the safety of the State. In other countries the crime and its punishment have been variously regarded, but in general laws and courts have been much more lenient with the woman having the abortion than with her accomplices. The Catholic Church, however, has in no way softened its rigour, and in 1917 the code of canon law called for the excommunication of all concerned in an abortion. The Pope has again quite recently declared that as between the life of the mother and that of the infant, the former must be sacrificed: of course the mother, being baptized, can gain entrance to heaven—oddy enough, hell never enters these calculations—whereas the fetus is doomed to limbo for eternity.[1] Abortion has been officially recognized during a brief period only: in Germany before Nazism, and in Russia before 1936. But in spite of religion and the law, it holds a place of considerable importance in all countries. In France

[1] We will return in Book Two to the discussion of this view, noting here only that the Catholics are far from keeping to the letter of St. Augustine's doctrine. The confessor whispers to the young fiancée the day before the wedding that she can behave in no matter what fashion with her husband from the moment that intercourse is properly completed; positive methods of birth control, including *coitus interruptus,* are forbidden, but one has the right to make use of the calendar established by the Viennese sexologists (the 'rhythm') and commit the act of which the sole recognized end is reproduction on days when conception is supposed to be impossible for the woman. There are spiritual advisers who even give this calendar to their flock. As a matter of fact, there are plenty of Christian mothers who have only two or three children though they did not completely sever marital relations after the last accouchement.

abortions number each year from 800,000 to 1,000,000—about as many as there are births—two-thirds of those aborted being married women, many already having one or two children.

Thus it is, then, that in spite of prejudices, opposition, and the survival of an outdated morality, we have witnessed the passage from free fecundity to a fecundity controlled by the State or by individuals. Progress in obstetrical science has considerably reduced the dangers of confinement; and the pain of childbirth is reduced. At this time—March 1949—legislation has been passed in England requiring the use of certain anaesthetic methods; they are in general application in the United States and are beginning to spread in France. Artificial insemination completes the evolutionary advance that will enable humanity to master the reproductive function. These changes are of tremendous importance for woman in particular; she can reduce the number of her pregnancies and make them a rationally integral part of her life, instead of being their slave. During the nineteenth century woman in her turn emancipated herself from nature; she gained mastery of her own body. Now protected in large part from the slavery of reproduction, she is in a position to assume the economic role that is offered her and will assure her of complete independence.

The evolution of woman's condition is to be explained by the concurrent action of these two factors: sharing in productive labour and being freed from slavery to reproduction. As Engels has foreseen, woman's social and political status was necessarily to be transformed. The feminist movement, sketched out in France by Condorcet, in England by Mary Wollstonecraft in her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, and taken up again at the beginning of the nineteenth century by the Saint-Simonists, had been unable to accomplish definite results, as it lacked concrete bases. But now, with woman in industry and out of the home, her demands began to take on full weight. They were to make themselves heard at the very centre of the bourgeoisie. In consequence of the rapid development of industrial civilization, landed property lost importance in relation to personal property, and the principle of the family group lost force. The liquidity of capital allowed its holder, instead of being possessed by it, to possess it without reciprocal cares of ownership, and to dispose of it at will. It was through the patrimony that woman had been most strongly attached to her spouse; with the patrimony a

thing of the past, they were simply in juxtaposition, and not even their children united them with a firmness comparable to that of property interest. Thus the individual was to gain independence against the group.

This process was especially striking in America, where modern capitalism triumphed: divorce was to flourish and husband and wife seem no more than provisional associates. In France, where the rural population was a factor of importance and the Code Napoléon placed the married woman under guardianship, the process of evolution was bound to be slow. In 1884 divorce was restored, and the wife could obtain it if the husband committed adultery. In the matter of penology, however, the sex difference was retained: adultery was a legal offence only when committed by the wife. The power of trusteeship, granted with reservations in 1907, was fully obtained only in 1917. In 1912 the determination of natural paternity was authorized. The status of the married woman was modified in 1938 and 1942: the duty of obedience was then abrogated, though the father remained the head of the family. He determined the place of residence, though the wife could oppose his choice if she had good arguments. Her legal powers were increased; but in the confused statement: 'the married woman has full legal powers. These powers are limited only by the marriage contract and the law', the last part of the article contradicts the first. The equality of husband and wife was not yet an accomplished fact.

As for political rights, we can say that they were not easily achieved in France, England, and the United States. In 1867 John Stuart Mill made before the English Parliament the first speech ever officially presented in favour of votes for women. In his writings he imperiously demanded equality for woman and man within the family and in society at large. 'I am convinced that social arrangements which subordinate one sex to the other by law are bad in themselves and form one of the principal obstacles which oppose human progress; I am convinced that they should give place to a perfect equality.' Following him, Englishwomen organized politically under Mrs. Fawcett's leadership; the Frenchwomen rallied behind Maria Deraismes, who between 1868 and 1871 examined the lot of woman in a series of public conferences; she kept up a lively controversy with Alexandre Dumas *fils*, who gave the advice: 'Kill her' to the husband deceived by an unfaithful wife. Léon Richier, who was the true founder

of feminism, produced in 1869 'The Rights of Woman' and organized the international congress on the subject, held in 1878. The question of the right to vote was not yet raised, the women limiting themselves to claiming civil rights. For nearly thirty years the movement remained very timid, in France as in England. Numerous groups were formed, but little was accomplished, because, as we have noted, women lacked solidarity as a sex.

The Socialist Congress of 1879 proclaimed the equality of the sexes, but feminism was a secondary interest since woman's emancipation was seen as depending on the liberation of the workers in general. In contrast, the bourgeois women were demanding new rights within the frame of existing social institutions and were far from being revolutionaries. They favoured such virtuous reforms as the suppression of alcoholism, pornographic literature, and prostitution. A Feminist Congress was held in 1892, which gave its name to the movement but accomplished little else. A few advances were made, but in 1901 the question of votes for women was brought up for the first time before the Chamber of Deputies, by Viviani. The movement gained in importance, and in 1909 the French Union for Woman Suffrage was founded, with meetings and demonstrations organized by Mme Brunschwig. A woman-suffrage bill passed the Chamber in 1919, but failed in the Senate in 1922. The situation was complicated: to revolutionary feminism and the 'independent' feminism of Mme Brunschwig was added a Christian feminism, when Pope Benedict XV in 1919 pronounced in favour of votes for women. The Catholics felt that women in France represented a conservative and religious element; but the radicals feared precisely this. As late as 1932, extended debates took place in the Chamber and in the Senate, and all the anti-feminist arguments of a half-century were brought forward: the chivalrous thought that woman was on a pedestal and should stay there; the notion that the 'true woman' would remain at home and not lose her charm in voting, since she governs men without need of the ballot. And more seriously it was urged that politics would disrupt families; that women are different anyway—they do not perform military service. And it was asked: should prostitutes have the vote? Men were better educated; women would vote as told to by their husbands; if they wished to be free, let them first get free from their dressmakers; and anyway there were more women than men in France! Poor as these arguments were, it was neces-

sary to wait until 1945 for the Frenchwomen to gain her political enfranchisement.

New Zealand gave woman full rights in 1893, and Australia followed in 1908. But in England and America the victory was difficult. Victorian England isolated woman in the home ; Jane Austen hid herself in order to write ; scientists proclaimed that woman was 'a subspecies destined only for reproduction'. Feminism was very timid until about 1903, when the Pankhurst family founded in London the Women's Social and Political Union, and feminist agitation took on a singular and militant character. For the first time in history women were to be seen taking action as women, which gives a special interest to the 'suffragette' adventure. For fifteen years they exerted pressure, at first without violence, marching with banners, invading meetings, provoking arrest, putting on hunger strikes, marching on Parliament with shawled workers and great ladies in line together, holding meetings, inciting further arrests, parading in columns miles long when votes on suffrage were being taken in Parliament. In 1912 more violent tactics were adopted: they burned houses, slashed pictures, trampled flowerbeds, threw stones at the police, overwhelmed Asquith and Sir Edward Grey with repeated deputations, interrupted public speeches. The war intervened. English women got the vote with restrictions in 1918, and the unrestricted vote in 1928. Their success was in large part due to the services they rendered during the war.

The American woman has from the first been more emancipated than her European sister. At the beginning of the nineteenth century women had to share with men the hard work of pioneering ; they fought at their side ; they were far fewer than the men, and this put a high value on them. But gradually their condition approached that of the women of the Old World ; they were highly regarded and dominant within the family, but social control remained entirely within male hands. Towards 1830 certain women began to lay claim to political rights ; they undertook a campaign in favour of the Negroes. Lucretia Mott, the Quakeress, founded an American feminist association, and at a convention in 1840 there was issued a manifesto of Quaker inspiration which set the tone for all American feminism. 'Man and women were created equals, provided by the Creator with inalienable rights . . . The government is set up only to safeguard these rights . . . Man has made a civic corpse of the married woman . . . He is usurping the prerogatives

of Jehovah who alone can assign human beings to their sphere of action.' Three years later Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* which aroused public opinion in favour of the Negroes. Emerson and Lincoln supported the feminist movement. After the Civil War the feminists demanded in vain that the amendment giving the vote to the Negroes should give it also to women; taking advantage of an ambiguity, Susan B. Anthony and fourteen comrades voted in Rochester; she was fined one hundred dollars. In 1869 she founded the National Association for Woman Suffrage, and in the same year Wyoming gave women the vote. In 1893 Colorado followed, then in 1896 Idaho and Utah.

Progress was very slow thereafter; but economically woman succeeded better than in Europe. In 1900, 5,000,000 worked in the United States, including a large number in business and the learned professions. There were lawyers, doctors, professors, and as many as 3,373 woman pastors. Mary Baker Eddy founded the Christian Science Church. Women's clubs flourished, with about 2,000,000 members in 1900. But only nine states had given the vote to women. In 1913 the suffrage movement was organized on the militant English model. It was directed by two women: Doris Stevens and a Quakeress, Alice Paul, who arranged for meetings, parades, and other such manifestations. In Chicago for the first time a Woman's Party was founded. In 1917 the suffragettes stood at the doors of the White House, banners in hand, sometimes chained to ironwork so as not to be dislodged. They were arrested after six months but put on a hunger strike in prison and were soon released. After new disorders, a committee of the House met with one from the Woman's Party, and on January 10th, 1918, a constitutional amendment was passed. The Senate failed to pass it by two votes this time, but it did pass it a year later, and woman suffrage became the law of the land in 1920. Inter-American conferences led up to the signing in 1933 by nineteen American republics of a convention giving to women equality in all rights.

In Sweden also there existed a very important feminist movement. Invoking old Swedish tradition, the feminists demanded the right 'to education, to work, to liberty'. Women writers especially took the lead in this struggle, and it was the moral aspect of the problem that interested them at first. Grouped in powerful associations, they won over the liberals,

but ran up against the hostility of the conservatives. The Norwegian women won the suffrage in 1907, the Finnish women in 1906, but the Swedish women were to wait for years.

Latin countries, like Oriental countries, keep woman in subjection less by the rigour of the laws than by the severity of custom. In Italy, Fascism systematically hindered the progress of feminism. Seeking alliance with the Church, leaving the family untouched, and continuing a tradition of feminine slavery, Fascist Italy put woman in double bondage: to the public authorities and to her husband. The course of events was very different in Germany. A student named Hippel hurled the first manifesto of German feminism in 1790, and at the beginning of the nineteenth century a sentimental feminism was flourishing, akin to that of George Sand. In 1848 the first German woman feminist, Louise Otto, demanded for women the right to share in reforms of nationalist character and founded in 1865 a women's association. German Socialists favoured feminism, and Clara Zetkin in 1892 was among the party leaders. Female workers and Socialists formed a federation. Women took active part in the war, in 1914; and after the German defeat women got the vote and were active in political life. Rosa Luxemburg battled in the Spartacus group beside Liebknecht and was assassinated in 1919. The majority of German women came out for the party of order; several sat in the Reichstag. Thus it was upon emancipated women that Hitler imposed anew the Napoleonic ideal: *'Küche, Kirche, Kinder.'* And he declared that 'the presence of a woman would dishonour the Reichstag'. As Nazism was anti-Catholic and anti-bourgeois, it gave a privileged place to motherhood, freeing women very largely from marriage through the protection it gave to unmarried mothers and to natural children. As in Sparta, woman depended upon the State much more than upon any individual man, and this gave her at once more and less independence than a middle-class woman would have living under a capitalist regime.

In Soviet Russia the feminist movement has made the most sweeping advances. It began among female student intellectuals at the end of the nineteenth century, and was even then connected with violent and revolutionary activity. During the Russo-Japanese War women replaced men in many kinds of work and made organized demands for equality. After 1905 they took part in political strikes and mounted the barricades; and in 1917, a few days before the Revolution, they held a mass demonstration in St. Petersburg, demanding bread, peace,

and the return of their men. They played a great part in the October rising and, later, in the battle against invasion. Faithful to Marxist tradition, Lenin bound the emancipation of women to that of the workers; he gave them political and economic equality.

Article 122 of the Constitution of 1936 states: 'In Soviet Russia woman enjoys the same rights as man in all aspects of economic, official, cultural, public, and political life.' And this has been more precisely stated by the Communist International, which makes the following demands: 'Social equality of man and woman before the law and in practical life. Radical transformation in conjugal rights and the family code. Recognition of maternity as a social function. Making a social charge of the care and education of children and adolescents. The organization of a civilizing struggle against the ideology and the traditions that make woman a slave.' In the economic field woman's conquests have been brilliant. She gets equal wages and participates on a large scale in production; and on account of this she has assumed a considerable social and political importance. There were in 1939 a great many women deputies to the various regional and local soviets, and more than two hundred sat in the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R. Almost ten million are members of unions. Women constitute forty per cent of the workers and employees of the U.S.S.R.; and many women workers have become Stakhanovites. It is well known that Russian women took a great part in the last war, penetrating even into masculine aspects of production such as metallurgy and mining, rafting of timber, and railway construction. Women also distinguished themselves as aviators and parachute troops, and they formed partisan armies.

This activity of women in public life raised a difficult problem: what should be women's role in family life? During a whole period means had been sought to free her from domestic bonds. On November 16th, 1924, the Comintern in plenary session proclaimed: 'The Revolution is impotent as long as the notion of family and of family relations continues to exist.' The respect thereupon accorded to free unions, the facility of divorce, and the legalizing of abortions assured woman's liberty with relation to the male; laws concerning maternity leave, day nurseries, kindergartens, and the like alleviated the cares of maternity. It is difficult to make out through the haze of passionate and contradictory testimony just what woman's concrete situation really was; but what is

sure is that today the requirements of repeopling the country have led to a different political view of the family: the family now appears as the elementary cell of society, and woman is both worker and housekeeper.[1] Sexual morality is of the strictest; the laws of 1936 and 1941 forbid abortion and almost suppress divorce; adultery is condemned by custom. Strictly subordinated to the State like all workers, strictly bound to the home, but having access to political life and to the dignity conferred by productive labour, the Russian woman is in a singular condition which would repay the close study that circumstances unfortunately prevent me from undertaking.

The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women at a recent session demanded that equality in rights of the two sexes be recognized in all countries, and it passed several motions tending to make this legal statute a concrete reality. It would seem, then, that the game is won. The future can only lead to a more and more profound assimilation of woman into our once masculine society.

If we cast a general glance over this history, we see several conclusions that stand out from it. And this one first of all: the whole of feminine history has been man-made. Just as in America there is no Negro problem, but rather a white problem;[2] just as 'anti-semitism is not a Jewish problem; it is our problem';[3] so the woman problem has always been a man's problem. We have seen why men had moral prestige along with physical strength from the start; they created values, mores, religions; never have women disputed this empire with them. Some isolated individuals—Sappho, Christine de Pisan, Mary Wollstonecraft, Olympe de Gouges—have protested against the harshness of their destiny, and occasionally mass demonstrations have been made; but neither the Roman matrons uniting against the Oppian law nor the Anglo-Saxon suffragettes could have succeeded with their pressure unless

[1] Olga Michakova, secretary of the central committee of the Communist Youth Organization, declared in 1944 in an interview: 'Soviet women should try to make themselves as attractive as nature and good taste permit. After the war they should dress like women and have a feminine gait . . . Girls are to be told to behave properly and walk like girls, and for this reason they will probably wear very narrow skirts which will compel a graceful carriage.'

[2] Cf. MYRDAL, *The American Dilemma.*

[3] Cf. J. P. SARTRE, *Réflexions sur la question juive.*

the men had been quite disposed to submit to it. Men have always held the lot of woman in their hands; and they have determined what it should be, not according to her interest, but rather with regard to their own projects, their fears, and their needs. When they revered the Goddess Mother, it was because they feared Nature; when the bronze tool allowed them to face Nature boldly, they instituted the patriarchate; then it became the conflict between family and State that defined woman's status; the Christian's attitude towards God, the world, and his own flesh was reflected in the situation to which he consigned her; what was called in the Middle Ages 'the quarrel of women' was a quarrel between clerics and laymen over marriage and celibacy; it was the social regime founded on private property that entailed the guardianship of the married woman, and it is the technological evolution accomplished by men that has emancipated the women of today. It was a transformation in masculine ethics that brought about a reduction in family size through birth control and partially freed woman from bondage to maternity. Feminism itself was never an autonomous movement; it was in part an instrument in the hands of politicians, in part an epiphenomenon reflecting a deeper social drama. Never have women constituted a separate caste, nor in truth have they ever as a sex sought to play a historic role. The doctrines that object to the advent of woman considered as flesh, life, immanence, the Other, are masculine ideologies in no way expressing feminine aspirations. The majority of women resign themselves to their lot without attempting to take any action; those who have tried to change it have intended not to be confined within the limits of their peculiarity and cause it to triumph, but to rise above it. When they have intervened in the course of world affairs, it has been in accord with men, in masculine perspectives.

This intervention, in general, has been secondary and episodic. The classes in which women enjoyed some economic independence and took part in production were the oppressed classes, and as women workers they were enslaved even more than the male workers. In the ruling classes woman was a parasite and as such was subjected to masculine laws. In both cases it was practically impossible for woman to take action. The law and the mores did not always coincide, and between them the equilibrium was established in such a manner that woman was never concretely free. In the ancient Roman Republic economic conditions gave the matron concrete

powers, but she had no legal independence. Conditions were often similar for woman in peasant cizilizations and among the lower commercial middle class: mistress-servant in the house, but socially a minor. Inversely, in epochs of social disintegration woman is set free, but in ceasing to be man's vassal, she loses her fief ; she has only a negative liberty, which is expressed in licence and dissipation. So it was with woman during the decline of Rome, the Renaissance, the eighteenth century, the Directory (1795-99). Sometimes she succeeded in keeping busy, but found herself enslaved ; or she was set free and no longer knew what to do with herself. One remarkable fact among others is that the married woman had her place in society but enjoyed no rights therein ; whereas the unmarried female, honest woman or prostitute, had all the legal capacities of a man, but up to this century was more or less excluded from social life.

From this opposition of legal rights and social custom has resulted, among other things, this curious paradox: free love is not forbidden by law, whereas adultery is an offence ; but very often the young girl who 'goes wrong' is dishonoured, whereas the misconduct of the wife is viewed indulgently ; and in consequence many young women from the seventeenth century to our own day have married in order to be able to take lovers freely. By means of this ingenious system the great mass of women is held closely in leading strings: exceptional circumstances are required if a feminine personality is to succeed in asserting itself between these two series of restraints, theoretical or concrete. The women who have accomplished works comparable to those of men are those exalted by the power of social institutions above all sexual differentiation. Queen Isabella, Queen Elizabeth, Catherine the Great were neither male nor female—they were sovereigns. It is remarkable that their femininity, when socially abolished, should have no longer meant inferiority: the proportion of queens who had great reigns is infinitely above that of great kings. Religion works the same transformation: Catherine of Siena, St. Theresa, quite beyond any physiological consideration, were sainted souls ; the life they led, secular and mystic, their acts, and their writings rose to heights that few men have ever reached.

It is quite conceivable that if other women fail to make a deep impression upon the world, it is because they are tied down in their situation. They can hardly take a hand in affairs in other than a negative and oblique manner. Judith, Charlotte

Corday, Vera Zasulich were assassins; the *Frondeuses* were conspirators; during the Revolution, during the Commune, women battled beside the men against the established order. Against a liberty without rights, without powers, woman has been permitted to rise in refusal and revolt, while being forbidden to participate in positively constructive effort; at the most she may succeed in joining men's enterprises through an indirect road. Aspasia, Mme de Maintenon, the Princess des Ursins were counsellors who were listened to seriously—yet somebody had to be willing to listen to them. Men are glad to exaggerate the extent of these influences when they wish to convince woman that she has chosen the better part; but as a matter of fact, feminine voices are silent when it comes to concrete action. They have been able to stir up wars, not to propose battle tactics; they have directed politics only where politics is reduced to intrigue; the true control of the world has never been in the hands of women; they have not brought their influence to bear upon technique or economy, they have not made and unmade states, they have not discovered new worlds. Through them certain events have been set off, but the women have been pretexts rather than agents. The suicide of Lucretia has had value only as a symbol. Martyrdom remains open to the oppressed; during the Christian persecutions, on the morrow of social or national defeats, women have played this part of witness; but never has a martyr changed the face of the world. Even when women have started things and made demonstrations, these moves have taken on weight only when a masculine decision has effectively extended them. The American women grouped around Harriet Beecher Stowe aroused public opinion violently against slavery; but the true reasons for the War of Secession were not of a sentimental order. The 'woman's day' of March 8th, 1917, may perhaps have precipitated the Russian Revolution—but it was only a signal.

Most female heroines are oddities; adventuresses and originals notable less for the importance of their acts than for the singularity of their fates. Thus if we compare Joan of Arc, Mme Roland, Flora Tristan, with Richelieu, Danton, Lenin, we see that their greatness is primarily subjective; they are exemplary figures rather than historical agents. The great man springs from the masses and he is propelled onward by circumstances; the masses of women are on the margin of history, and circumstances are an obstacle for each individual, not a springboard. In order to change the face of the

world, it is first necessary to be firmly anchored in it ; but the women who are firmly rooted in society are those who are in subjection to it ; unless designated for action by divine authority—and then they have shown themselves to be as capable as men—the ambitious woman and the heroine are strange monsters. It is only since women have begun to feel themselves at home on the earth that we have seen a Rosa Luxemburg, a Mme Curie appear. They brilliantly demonstrate that it is not the inferiority of women that has caused their historical insignificance: it is rather their historical insignificance that has doomed them to inferiority.[1]

This fact is glaringly clear in the domain in which women have best succeeded in asserting themselves—that is, the domain of culture. Their lot has been deeply bound up with that of arts and letters ; among the ancient Germans the functions of prophetess and priestess were already appropriate to women. Because of woman's marginal position in the world, men will turn to her when they strive through culture to go beyond the boundaries of their universe and gain access to something other than what they have known. Courtly mysticism, humanist curiosity, the taste for beauty which flourished in the Italian Renaissance, the preciosity of the seventeenth century, the progressive idealism of the eighteenth—all brought about under different forms an exaltation of femininity. Woman was thus the guiding star of poetry, the subject-matter of the work of art ; her leisure allowed her to consecrate herself to the pleasures of the spirit: inspiration, critic, and public of the writer, she became his rival ; she it was who often made prevail a mode of sensibility, an ethic that fed masculine hearts, and thus she intervened in her own destiny—the education of women was in large part a feminine conquest. And yet, however important this collective role of the intellectual woman may have been, the individual contributions have been in general of less value. It is because she has not been engaged in action that woman has had a privileged place in the domains of thought and of art ; but art and thought have their living springs in action. To be situated at the margin of the world is not a position favourable for one

[1] It is remarkable that out of a thousand statues in Paris (excepting the queens that for a purely architectural reason form the corbel of the Luxembourg) there should be only ten raised to women. Three are consecrated to Joan of Arc. The others are statues of Mme de Ségur, George Sand, Sarah Bernhardt, Mme Boucicaut and the Baroness de Hirsch, Maria Deraismes, and Rosa Bonheur.

who aims at creating anew: here again, to emerge beyond the given, it is necessary first to be deeply rooted in it. Personal accomplishment is almost impossible in the human categories that are maintained collectively in an inferior situation. 'Where would you have one go, with skirts on?' Marie Bashkirtsev wanted to know. And Stendhal said: 'All the geniuses who are born *women* are lost to the public good.' To tell the truth, one is not born a genius: one becomes a genius; and the feminine situation has up to the present rendered this becoming practically impossible.

The anti-feminists obtain from the study of history two contradictory arguments: (1) women have never created anything great; and (2) the situation of woman has never prevented the flowering of great feminine personalities. There is bad faith in these two statements; the successes of a privileged few do not counterbalance or excuse the systematic lowering of the collective level; and that these successes are rare and limited proves precisely that circumstances are unfavourable for them. As has been maintained by Christine de Pisan, Poulain de la Barre, Condorcet, John Stuart Mill, and Stendhal, in no domain has woman ever really had her chance. That is why a great many woman today demand a new status; and once again their demand is not that they be exalted in their femininity: they wish that in themselves, as in humanity in general, transcendence may prevail over immanence; they wish to be accorded at last the abstract rights and concrete possibilities without the concurrence of which liberty is only a mockery.[1]

This wish is on the way to fulfilment. But the period in which we live is a period of transition; this world, which has always belonged to the men, is still in their hands; the institutions and the values of the patriarchal civilization still survive in large part. Abstract rights are far from being completely granted everywhere to women: in Switzerland they do not yet vote; in France the law of 1942 maintains in attenuated form the privileges of the husband. And abstract rights, as I have just been saying, have never sufficed to assure to woman

[1] Here again the anti-feminists take an equivocal line. Now, regarding abstract liberty as nothing, they expatiate on the great concrete role that the enslaved woman can play in the world—what, then, is she asking for? Again, they disregard the fact that negative licence opens no concrete possibilities, and they reproach women who are abstractly emancipated for not having produced evidence of their abilities.

a definite hold on the world: true equality between the two sexes does not exist even today.

In the first place, the burdens of marriage weigh much more heavily upon woman than upon man. We have noted that servitude to maternity has been reduced by the use—admitted or clandestine—of birth control; but the practice has not spread everywhere nor is it invariably used. Abortion being officially forbidden, many women either risk their health in unsupervised efforts to abort or find themselves overwhelmed by their numerous pregnancies. The care of children like the upkeep of the home is still undertaken almost exclusively by woman. Especially in France the anti-feminist tradition is so tenacious that a man would feel that he was lowering himself by helping with tasks hitherto assigned to women. The result is that it is more difficult for woman than for man to reconcile her family life with her role as worker. Whenever society demands this effort, her life is much harder than her husband's.

Consider for example the lot of peasant women. In France they make up the majority of women engaged in productive labour; and they are generally married. Customs vary in different regions: the Norman peasant woman presides at meals, whereas the Corsican woman does not sit at table with the men; but everywhere, playing a most important part in the domestic economy, she shares the man's responsibilities, interests, and property; she is respected and often is in effective control—her situation recalls that of woman in the old agricultural communities. She often has more moral prestige than her husband, but she lives in fact a much harder life. She has exclusive care of garden, sheepfold, pigpen, and so on, and shares in the hard labour of stablework, planting, ploughing, weeding and haying; she spades, reaps, picks grapes and sometimes helps load and unload wagons with hay, wood and so forth. She cooks, keeps house, does washing, mending and the like. She takes on the heavy duties of maternity and child care. She gets up at dawn, feeds the poultry and other small livestock, serves breakfast to the men, goes to work in field, wood, or garden; she draws water, serves a second meal, washes the dishes, works in the fields until time for dinner, and afterwards spends the evening mending, cleaning, knitting and what not. Having no time to care for her own health, even when pregnant, she soon gets misshapen; she is prematurely withered and worn out, gnawed by sickness. The compensations man finds in occasional social life are denied

to her: he goes in to town on Sundays and market days, meets other men, drinks and plays cards in cafés, goes hunting and fishing. She stays at home on the farm and knows no leisure. Only the well-to-do peasant women, who have servants or can avoid field labour, lead a well-balanced life: they are socially honoured and at home exert a great deal of authority without being crushed by work. But for the most part rural labour reduces woman to the condition of a beast of burden.

The business-woman and the female employer who runs a small enterprise have always been among the privileged; they are the only women recognized since the Middle Ages by the Code as having civil rights and powers. Female grocers, dairy keepers, landladies, tobacconists have a position equivalent to man's; as spinsters or widows, they can in themselves constitute a legal firm; married, they have the same independence as their husbands. Fortunately their work can be carried on in the place where they live, and usually it is not too absorbing.

Things are quite otherwise for the woman worker or employee, the secretary, the saleswoman, all of whom go to work outside the home. It is much more difficult for them to combine their employment with household duties, which would seem to require at least three and a half hours a day, with perhaps six hours on Sunday—a good deal to add to the hours in factory or office. As for the learned professions, even if women lawyers, doctors, and professors obtain some housekeeping help, the home and children are for them also a burden that is a heavy handicap. In America domestic work is simplified by ingenious gadgets; but the elegant appearance required of the working-woman imposes upon her another obligation, and she remains responsible for house and children.

Furthermore, the woman who seeks independence through work has less favourable possibilities than her masculine competitors. Her wages in most jobs are lower than those of men; her tasks are less specialized and therefore not so well paid as those of skilled labourers; and for equal work she does not get equal pay. Because of the fact that she is a newcomer in the universe of males, she has fewer chances for success than they have. Men and women alike hate to be under the orders of a woman; they always show more confidence in a man; to be a woman is, if not a defect, at least a peculiarity. In order to 'arrive', it is well for a woman to make

sure of masculine backing. Men unquestionably occupy the most advantageous places, hold the most important posts. It is essential to emphasize the fact that men and women, economically speaking, constitute two castes.[1]

The fact that governs woman's actual condition is the obstinate survival of extremely antique traditions into the new civilization that is just appearing in vague outline. That is what is misunderstood by hasty observers who regard woman as not up to the possibilities now offered to her or again who see in these possibilities only dangerous temptations. The truth is that her situation is out of equilibrium, and for that reason it is very difficult for her to adapt herself to it. We open the factories, the offices, the faculties to woman, but we continue to hold that marriage is for her a most honourable career, freeing her from the need of any other participation in the collective life. As in primitive civilizations, the act of love is on her part a service for which she has the right to be more or less directly paid. Except in the Soviet Union,[2] modern woman is everywhere permitted to regard her body as capital for exploitation. Prostitution is tolerated,[3] gallantry encouraged. And the married woman is empowered to see to it that her husband supports her ; in addition she is clothed in a social dignity far superior to that of the spinster. The mores are far from conceding to the latter sexual possibili-

[1] In America the great fortunes often fall finally into women's hands: younger than their husbands, they survive them and inherit from them; but by that time they are getting old and rarely have the initiative to make new investments; they are enjoyers of income rather than proprietors. It is really men who handle the capital funds. At any rate, these privileged rich women make up only a tiny minority. In America, much more than in Europe, it is almost impossible for a woman to reach a high position as lawyer, doctor, etc.

[2] At least according to official doctrine.

[3] In Anglo-Saxon countries prostitution has never been regulated. Up to 1900 English and American common law did not regard it as an offence except when it made public scandal and created disorder. Since that date repression has been more or less rigorously imposed, more or less successfully, in England and in the various states of the United States, where legislation in the matter is very diverse. In France, after a long campaign for abolition, the law of April 13th, 1946, ordered the closing of licensed brothels and the intensifying of the struggle against procuring: 'Holding that the existence of these houses is incompatible with the essential principles of human dignity and the role awarded to woman in modern society.' But prostitution continues none the less to carry on. It is evident that the situation cannot be modified by negative and hypocritical measures.

ties equivalent to those of the bachelor male; in particular maternity is practically forbidden her, the unmarried mother remaining an object of scandal. How, indeed, could the myth of Cinderella[1] not keep all its validity? Everything still encourages the young girl to expect fortune and happiness from some Prince Charming rather than to attempt by herself their difficult and uncertain conquest. In particular she can hope to rise, thanks to him, into a caste superior to her own, a miracle that could not be bought by the labour of her lifetime. But such a hope is a thing of evil because it divides her strength and her interests;[2] this division is perhaps woman's greatest handicap. Parents still bring up their daughter with a view to marriage rather than to furthering her personal development; she sees so many advantages in it that she herself wishes for it; the result is that she is often less specially trained, less solidly grounded than her brothers, she is less deeply involved in her profession. In this way she dooms herself to remain in its lower levels, to be inferior; and the vicious circle is formed: this professional inferiority reinforces her desire to find a husband.

Every benefit always has as its bad side some burden; but if the burden is too heavy, the benefit seems no longer to be anything more than a servitude. For the majority of labourers, labour today is a thankless drudgery, but in the case of woman this is not compensated for by a definite conquest of her social dignity, her freedom of behaviour, or her economic independence; it is natural for many women workers and employees to see in the right to work only an obligation from which marriage will deliver them. Because of the fact that she has taken on awareness of self, however, and because she can also free herself from marriage through a job, woman no longer accepts domestic subjection with docility. What she would hope is that the reconciliation of family life with a job should not require of her an exhausting, difficult performance. Even then, as long as the temptations of convenience exist—in the economic inequality that favours certain individuals and the recognized right of woman to sell herself to one of these privileged men—she will need to make a greater moral effort than would a man in choosing the road of independence. It has not been sufficiently realized that the temptation is also an obstacle, and even one of the most dan-

[1] Cf. PHILIP WYLIE, *Generation of Vipers* (Farrar, Straus & Co., 1942).

[2] We will return to this point at some length in Book Two.

gerous. Here a hoax is involved, since in fact there will be only one winner out of thousands in the lottery of marriage. The present epoch invites, even compels women to work; but is flashes before their eyes paradises of idleness and delight: it exalts the winners far above those who remain tied down to earth.

The privileged place held by men in economic life, their social usefulness, the prestige of marriage, the value of masculine backing, all this makes women wish ardently to please men. Women are still, for the most part, in a state of subjection. It follows that woman sees herself and makes her choices not in accordance with her true nature in itself, but as man defines her. So we must first go on to describe woman such as men have fancied her in their dreams, for what-in-men's-eyes-she-seems-to-be is one of the necessary factors in her real situation.

# PART III

# MYTHS

CHAPTER I

# DREAMS, FEARS, IDOLS

HISTORY has shown us that men have always kept in their hands all concrete powers; since the earliest days of the patriarchate they have thought best to keep woman in a state of dependence; their codes of law have been set up against her; and thus she has been definitely established as the Other. This arrangement suited the economic interests of the males; but it conformed also to their ontological and moral pretensions. Once the subject seeks to assert himself, the Other, who limits and denies him, is none the less a necessity to him: he attains himself only through that reality which he is not, which is something other than himself. That is why man's life is never abundance and quietude; it is dearth and activity, it is struggle. Before him, man encounters Nature; he has some hold upon her, he endeavours to mould her to his desire. But she cannot fill his needs. Either she appears simply as a purely impersonal opposition, she is an obstacle and remains a stranger; or she submits passively to man's will and permits assimilation, so that he takes possession of her only through consuming her—that is, through destroying her. In both cases he remains alone; he is alone when he touches a stone, alone when he devours a fruit. There can be no presence of an other unless the other is also present in and for himself: which is to say that true alterity—otherness—is that of a consciousness separate from mine and substantially identical with mine.

It is the existence of other men that tears each man out of his immanence and enables him to fulfil the truth of his being, to complete himself through transcendence, through escape towards some objective, through enterprise. But this liberty not my own, while assuring mine, also conflicts with it: there is the tragedy of the unfortunate human conscious-

ness; each separate conscious being aspires to set himself up alone as sovereign subject. Each tries to fulfil himself by reducing the other to slavery. But the slave, though he works and fears, senses himself somehow as the essential; and, by a dialectical inversion, it is the master who seems to be inessential. It is possible to rise above this conflict if each individual freely recognizes the other, each regarding himself and the other simultaneously as object and as subject in a reciprocal manner. But friendship and generosity, which alone permit in actuality this recognition of free beings, are not facile virtues; they are assuredly man's highest achievement, and through that achievement he is to be found in his true nature. But this true nature is that of a struggle unceasingly begun, unceasingly abolished; it requires man to outdo himself at every moment. We might put it in other words and say that man attains an authentically moral attitude when he renounces *mere being* to assume his position as an existent; through this transformation also he renounces all possession, for possession is one way of seeking mere being; but the transformation through which he attains true wisdom is never done, it is necessary to make it without ceasing, it demands a constant tension. And so, quite unable to fulfil himself in solitude, man is incessantly in danger in his relations with his fellows: his life is a difficult enterprise with success never assured.

But he does not like difficulty; he is afraid of danger. He aspires in contradictory fashion both to life and to repose, to existence and to merely being; he knows full well that 'trouble of spirit' is the price of development, that his distance from the object is the price of his nearness to himself; but he dreams of quiet in disquiet and of an opaque plenitude that nevertheless would be endowed with consciousness. This dream incarnated is precisely woman; she is the wished-for intermediary between nature, the stranger to man, and the fellow who is too closely identical.[1] She opposes him with neither the hostile silence of nature nor the hard requirement of a reciprocal relation; through a unique privilege she is a conscious being and yet it seems possible to possess her in the

[1] '... Woman is not the useless replica of man, but rather the enchanted place where the living alliance between man and nature is brought about. If she should disappear, men would be alone, strangers lacking passports in an icy world. She is the earth itself raised to life's summit, the earth become sensitive and joyous; and without her, for man the earth is mute and dead,' writes MICHEL CARROUGES ('Les Pouvoirs de la femme', *Cahiers du Sud*, No. 292).

flesh. Thanks to her, there is a means for escaping that implacable dialectic of master and slave which has its source in the reciprocity that exists between free beings.

We have seen that there were not at first free women whom the males had enslaved nor were there even castes based on sex. To regard woman simply as a slave is a mistake; there were women among the slaves, to be sure, but there have always been free women—that is, women of religious and social dignity. They accepted man's sovereignty and he did not feel menaced by a revolt that could make of him in turn the object. Women thus seems to be the inessential who never goes back to being the essential, to be the absolute Other, without reciprocity. This conviction is dear to the male, and every creation myth has expressed it, among others the legend of Genesis, which, through Christianity, has been kept alive in Western civilization. Eve was not fashioned at the same time as the man; she was not fabricated from a different substance, nor of the same clay as was used to model Adam: she was taken from the flank of the first male. Not even her birth was independent; God did not spontaneously choose to create her as an end in herself and in order to be worshipped directly by her in return for it. She was destined by Him for man; it was to rescue Adam from loneliness that He gave her to him, in her mate was her origin and her purpose; she was his complement in the order of the inessential. Thus she appeared in the guise of privileged prey. She was nature elevated to transparency of consciousness; she was a conscious being, but naturally submissive. And therein lies the wondrous hope that man has often put in women: he hopes to fulfil himself as a being by carnally possessing a being, but at the same time confirming his sense of freedom through the docility of a free person. No one would consent to be a woman, but every man wants women to exist. 'Thank God for having created woman.' 'Nature is good since she has given women to men.' In such expressions man once more asserts with naive arrogance that his presence in this world is an ineluctable fact and a right, that of woman a mere accident—but a very happy accident. Appearing as the Other, woman appears at the same time as an abundance of being in contrast to that existence the nothingness of which man senses in himself; the Other, being regarded as the object in the eyes of the subject, is regarded as *en soi*; therefore as a being. In woman is incarnated in positive form the lack that the existent carries in his heart, and it is in seeking to be

made whole through her that man hopes to attain self-realization.

She has not represented for him, however, the only incarnation of the Other, and she has not always kept the same important throughout the course of history. There have been moments when she has been eclipsed by other idols. When the City or the State devours the citizen, it is no longer possible for him to be occupied with his personal destiny. Being dedicated to the State, the Spartan woman's condition was above that of other Greek women. But it is also true that she was transfigured by no masculine dream. The cult of the leader, whether he be Napoleon, Mussolini, or Hitler, excludes all other cults. In military dictatorships, in totalitarian regimes, woman is no longer a privileged object. It is understandable that woman should be deified in a rich country where the citizens are none too certain of the meaning of life: thus it is in America. On the other hand, socialist ideologies, which assert the equality of all human beings, refuse now and for the future to permit any human category to be object or idol: in the authentically democratic society proclaimed by Marx there is no place for the Other. Few men, however, conform exactly to the militant, disciplined figure they have chosen to be; to the degree in which they remain individuals, woman keeps in their eyes a special value. I have seen letters written by German soldiers to French prostitutes in which, in spite of Nazism, the ingrained tradition of virgin purity was naively confirmed. Communist writers, like Aragon in France and Vittorini in Italy, give a place of the first rank in their works to woman, whether mistress or mother. Perhaps the myth of woman will some day be extinguished; the more women assert themselves as human beings, the more the marvellous quality of the Other will die out in them. But today it still exists in the heart of every man.

A myth always implies a subject who projects his hopes and his fears towards a sky of transcendence. Women do not set themselves up as Subject and hence have erected no virile myth in which their projects are reflected; they have no religion or poetry of their own: they still dream through the dreams of men. Gods made by males are the gods they worship. Men have shaped for their own exaltation great virile figures: Hercules, Prometheus, Parsifal; woman has only a secondary part to play in the destiny of these heroes. No doubt there are conventional figures of man caught in his relations to woman: the father, the seducer, the husband, the

jealous lover, the good son, the wayward son; but they have all been established by men, and they lack the dignity of myth, being hardly more than clichés. Whereas woman is defined exclusively in her relation to man. The asymmetry of the categories—male and female—is made manifest in the unilateral form of sexual myths. We sometimes say 'the sex' to designate woman; she is the flesh, its delights and dangers. The truth that for woman man is sex and carnality has never been proclaimed because there is no one to proclaim it. Representation of the world, like the world itself, is the work of men; they describe it from their own point of view, which they confuse with absolute truth.

It is always difficult to describe a myth; it cannot be grasped or encompassed; it haunts the human consciousness without ever appearing before it in fixed form. The myth is so various, so contradictory, that at first its unity is not discerned: Delilah and Judith, Aspasia and Lucretia, Pandora and Athena—woman is at once Eve and the Virgin Mary. She is an idol, a servant, the source of life, a power of darkness; she is the elemental silence of truth, she is artifice, gossip, and falsehood; she is healing presence and sorceress; she is man's prey, his downfall, she is everything that he is not and that he longs for, his negation and his *raison d'être*.

'To be a woman,' says Kierkegaard in *Stages on the Road of Life,* 'is something so strange, so confused, so complicated, that no one predicate comes near expressing it and that the multiple predicates that one would like to use are so contradictory that only a woman could put up with it.' This comes from not regarding woman positively, such as she seems to herself to be, but negatively, such as she appears to man. For if woman is not the only *Other*, it remains none the less true that she is always defined as the Other. And her ambiguity is just that of the concept of the Other: it is that of the human situation in so far as it is defined in its relation with the Other. As I have already said, the Other is Evil; but being necessary to the Good, it turns into the Good; through it I attain to the Whole, but it also separates me therefrom; it is the gateway to the infinite and the measure of my finite nature. And here lies the reason why woman incarnates no stable concept; through her is made unceasingly the passage from hope to frustration, from hate to love, from good to evil, from evil to good. Under whatever aspect we may consider her, it is this ambivalence that strikes us first.

Man seeks in woman the Other as Nature and as his fellow being. But we know what ambivalent feelings Nature inspires in man. He exploits her, but she crushes him, he is born of her and dies in her; she is the source of his being and the realm that he subjugates to his will; Nature is a vein of gross material in which the soul is imprisoned, and she is the supreme reality; she is contingence and Idea, the finite and the whole; she is what opposes the Spirit, and the Spirit itself. Now ally, now enemy, she appears as the dark chaos from whence life itself wells up, as this life itself, and as the over-yonder towards which life tends. Woman sums up nature as Mother, Wife, and Idea; these forms now mingle and now conflict, and each of them wears a double visage.

Man has his roots deep in Nature; he has been engendered like the animals and plants; he well knows that he exists only so far as he lives. But since the coming of the patriarchate, Life has worn in his eyes a double aspect: it is consciousness, will, transcendence, it is the spirit; and it is matter, passivity, immanence, it is the flesh. Aeschylus, Aristotle, Hippocrates proclaimed that on earth as on Olympus it is the male principle that is truly creative: from it came form, number, movement; grain grows and multiplies through Demeter's care, but the origin of the grain and its verity lie in Zeus; woman's fecundity is regarded as only a passive quality. She is the earth, and man the seed; she is Water and he is Fire. Creation has often been imagined as the marriage of fire and water; it is warmth and moisture that give rise to living things; the Sun is the husband of the Sea; the Sun, fire, are male divinities; and the Sea is one of the most nearly universal of maternal symbols. Passively the waters accept the fertilizing action of the flaming radiations. So also the sod, broken by the ploughman's labour, passively receives the seeds within its furrows. But it plays a necessary part: it supports the living germ, protects it and furnishes the substance for its growth. And that is why man continued to worship the goddesses of fecundity, even after the Great Mother was dethroned;[1] he is indebted to Cybele for his crops, his herds, his whole prosperity. He even owes his own life to her. He sings the praises of water no less than fire. 'Glory to the sea! Glory to its waves surrounded with sacred fire! Glory to the wave! Glory

[1] 'I sing the earth, firmly founded mother of all, venerable grandmother, supporting on her soil all that lives,' says a Homeric hymn. And Aeschylus also glorifies the land which 'brings forth all beings, supports them, and then receives in turn their fertile seed'.

to the fire! Glory to the strange adventure,' cries Goethe in the Second Part of *Faust*. Man venerates the Earth: 'The matron Clay', as Blake calls her. A prophet of India advises his disciples not to spade the earth, for 'it is a sin to wound or to cut, to tear the mother of us all in the labours of cultivation . . . Shall I go take a knife and plunge it into my mother's breast? . . . Shall I hack at her flesh to reach her bones? . . . How dare I cut off my mother's hair?' In central India the Baidya also consider it a sin to 'tear their earth mother's breast with the plough'. Inversely, Aeschylus says of Oedipus that he 'dared to seed the sacred furrow wherein he was formed'. Sophocles speaks of 'paternal furrows' and of the 'ploughman, master of a distant field that he visits only once, at the time of sowing'. The loved one of an Egyptian song declares: 'I am the earth!' In Islamic texts woman is called 'field . . . vineyard'. St. Francis of Assisi speaks in one of his hymns of 'our sister, the earth, our mother, keeping and caring for us, producing all kinds of fruits, with many-coloured flowers and with grass'. Michelet, taking the mud baths at Acqui, exclaimed: 'Dear mother of all! We are one. I came from you, to you I return! . . .' And so it is in periods when there flourishes a vitalist romanticism that desires the triumph of Life over Spirit; then the magical fertility of the land, of woman, seems to be more wonderful than the contrived operations of the male: then man dreams of losing himself anew in the maternal shadows that he may find there again the true sources of his being. The mother is the root which, sunk in the depths of the cosmos, can draw up its juices; she is the fountain whence springs forth the living water, water that is also a nourishing milk, a warm spring, a mud made of earth and water, rich in restorative virtues.[1]

But more often man is in revolt against his carnal state; he sees himself as a fallen god: his curse is to be fallen from a bright and ordered heaven into the chaotic shadows of his mother's womb. This fire, this pure and active exhalation in which he likes to recognize himself, is imprisoned by woman in the mud of the earth. He would be inevitable, like a pure Idea, like the One, the All, the absolute Spirit; and he finds himself shut up in a body of limited powers, in a place and time he never chose, where he was not called for, useless, cumbersome, absurd. The contingency of all flesh is his own

[1] 'Literally, woman is Isis, fecund nature. She is the river and the river-bed, the root and the rose, the earth and the cherry tree, the vine-stock and the grape.' (CARROUGES, loc. cit.)

to suffer in his abandonment, in his unjustifiable needlessness. She also dooms him to death. This quivering jelly which is elaborated in the womb (the womb, secret and sealed like the tomb) evokes too clearly the soft viscosity of carrion for him not to turn shuddering away. Wherever life is in the making—germination, fermentation—it arouses disgust because it is made only in being destroyed; the slimy embryo begins the cycle that is completed in the putrefaction of death. Because he is horrified by needlessness and death, man feels horror at having been engendered; he would fain deny his animal ties; through the fact of his birth murderous Nature has a hold upon him.

Among primitive peoples childbirth is surrounded by the most severe taboos; in particular, the placenta must be carefully burned or thrown into the sea, for whoever should get possession of it would hold the fate of the newborn in his hands. That membranous mass by which the fetus grows is the sign of its dependency; when it is destroyed, the individual is enabled to tear himself from the living magma and become an autonomous being. The uncleanness of birth is reflected upon the mother. Leviticus and all the ancient codes impose rites of purification upon one who has given birth; and in many rural districts the ceremony of churching (blessing after childbirth) continues this tradition. We know the spontaneous embarrassment, often disguised under mocking laughter, felt by children, young girls, and men at sight of the pregnant abdomen: the swollen bosom of the woman with child. In museums the curious gaze at waxen embryos and preserved fetuses with the same morbid interest they show in a ravaged tomb. With all the respect thrown around it by society, the function of gestation still inspires a spontaneous feeling of revulsion. And if the little boy remains in early childhood sensually attached to the maternal flesh, when he grows older, becomes socialized, and takes note of his individual existence, this same flesh frightens him; he would ignore it and see in his mother only a moral personage. If he is anxious to believe her pure and chaste, it is less because of amorous jealousy than because of his refusal to see her as a body. The adolescent is embarrassed, he blushes, if while with his companions he happens to meet his mother, his sisters, any of his female relatives: it is because their presence calls him back to those realms of immanence whence he would fly, exposes roots from which he would tear himself loose. The little boy's irritation when his mother kisses and cajoles him has the same

significance; he disowns family, mother, maternal bosom. He would like to have sprung into the world, like Athena fully grown, fully armed, invulnerable.[1] To have been conceived and then born an infant is the curse that hangs over his destiny, the impurity that contaminates his being. And, too, it is the announcement of his death. The cult of germination has always been associated with the cult of the dead. The Earth Mother engulfs the bones of her children. They are women—the Parcae, the Moirai—who weave the destiny of mankind; but it is they, also, who cut the threads. In most popular representations Death is a woman, and it is for women to bewail the dead because death is their work.[2]

Thus the Woman-Mother has a face of shadows: she is the chaos whence all have come and whither all must one day return; she is Nothingness. In the Night are confused together the multiple aspects of the world which daylight reveals: night of spirit confined in the generality and opacity of matter, night of sleep and of nothingness. In the deeps of the sea it is night: woman is the *Mare tenebrarum,* dreaded by navigators of old; it is night in the entrails of the earth. Man is frightened of this night, the reverse of fecundity, which threatens to swallow him up. He aspires to the sky, to the light, to the sunny summits, to the pure and crystalline frigidity of the blue sky; and under his feet there is a moist, warm, and darkling gulf ready to draw him down; in many a legend do we see the hero lost for ever as he falls back into the maternal shadows —cave, abyss, hell.

But here again is the play of ambivalence: if germination is always associated with death, so is death with fecundity. Hated death appears as a new birth, and then it becomes blessed. The dead hero is resurrected, like Osiris, each spring, and he is regenerated by a new birth. Man's highest hope, says Jung, in *Metamorphoses of the Libido,* 'is that the dark waters of death become the waters of life, that death and its cold embrace be the motherly bosom, which like the ocean, although engulfing the sun, gives birth to it again within its depths'. A theme common to numerous mythologies is the burial of the sun-god in the bosom of the ocean and his

[1] See below (p. 223) the study of Montherlant, who embodies this attitude in exemplary fashion.

[2] Demeter typifies the *mater dolorosa.* But other goddesses—Ishtar, Artemis—are cruel. Kali holds in her hand a cranium filled with blood. A Hindu poet addresses her: 'The heads of thy newly killed sons hang like a necklace about thy neck . . . Thy form is beautiful like rain clouds, thy feet are soiled with blood.'

dazzling reappearance. And man at once wants to live but longs for repose and sleep and nothingness. He does not wish he were immortal, and so he can learn to love death. Nietzsche writes: 'Inorganic matter is the maternal bosom. To be freed of life is to become true again, it is to achieve perfection. Whoever should understand that would consider it a joy to return to the unfeeling dust.' Chaucer put his prayer into the mouth of an old man unable to die:

> With my staff, night and day
> I strike on the ground, my mother's doorway,
> And I say: Ah, mother dear, let me in.

Man would fain affirm his individual existence and rest with pride on his 'essential difference', but he wishes also to break through the barriers of the ego, to mingle with the water, the night, with Nothingness, with the Whole. Woman condemns man to finitude, but she also enables him to exceed his own limits; and hence comes the equivocal magic with which she is endued.

In all civilizations and still in our day woman inspires man with horror; it is the horror of his own carnal contingence, which he projects upon her. The little girl, not yet in puberty, carries no menace, she is under no taboo and has no sacred character. In many primitive societies her very sex seems innocent: erotic games are allowed from infancy between boys and girls. But on the day she can reproduce, woman becomes impure; and rigorous taboos surround the menstruating female. Leviticus gives elaborate regulations, and many primitive societies have similar rules regarding isolation and purification. In matriarchal societies the powers attributed to menstruation were ambivalent: the flow could upset social activities and ruin crops; but it was also used in love potions and medicines. Even today certain Indians put in the bow of the boat a mass of fibre soaked in menstrual blood, to combat river demons. But since patriarchal times only evil powers have been attributed to the feminine flow. Pliny said that a menstruating woman ruins crops, destroys gardens, kills bees, and so on; and that if she touches wine, it becomes vinegar; milk is soured, and the like. An ancient English poet put the same notion into rhyme:

> Oh! Menstruating woman, thou'st a fiend
> From whom all nature should be screened!

Such beliefs have survived with considerable power into recent times. In 1878 it was declared in the *British Medical Journal* that 'it is an undoubted fact that meat spoils when touched by menstruating women', and cases were cited from personal observation. And at the beginning of this century a rule forbade women having 'the curse' to enter the refineries of northern France, for that would cause the sugar to blacken. These ideas still persist in rural districts, where every cook knows that a mayonnaise will not be successful if a menstruating woman is about; some rustics believe cider will not ferment, others that bacon cannot be salted and will spoil under these circumstances. A few vaguely factual reports may offer some slight support for such beliefs; but it is obvious from their importance and universality that they must have had a superstitious or mystical origin. Certainly there is more here than reaction to blood in general, sacred as it is. But menstrual blood is peculiar, it represents the essence of femininity. Hence it can supposedly bring harm to the woman herself if misused by others. According to C. Lévi-Strauss, among the Chago the girls are warned not to let anyone see any signs of the flow; clothes must be buried, and so on, to avoid danger. Leviticus likens menstruation to gonorrhea, and Vigny associates the notion of uncleanness with that of illness when he writes: 'Woman, sick child and twelve times impure.'

The periodic haemorrhage of woman is strangely timed with the lunar cycle; and the moon also is thought to have her dangerous caprices.[1] Woman is a part of that fearsome machinery which turns the planets and the sun in their courses, she is the prey of cosmic energies that rule the destiny of the stars and the tides, and of which men must undergo the disturbing radiations. But menstrual blood is supposed to act especially on organic substances, half way between matter and life: souring cream, spoiling meat, causing fermentation, decomposition; and this less because it is blood than because it issues from the genital organs. Without comprehending its exact function, people have realized that it is bound to the

[1] The moon is a source of fertility; it appears as 'master of women'; it is often believed that in the form of man or serpent it couples with women. The serpent is an epiphany of the moon; it sheds its skin and renews itself, it is immortal, it is an influence promoting fecundity and knowledge. It is the serpent that guards the sacred springs, the tree of life, the fountain of youth. But it is also the serpent that took from man his immortality. Persian and rabbinical traditions maintain that menstruation is to be attributed to the relations of the woman with the serpent.

reproduction of life: ignorant of the ovary, the ancients even saw in the menses the complement of the sperm. The blood, indeed, does not make woman impure; it is rather a sign of her impurity. It concerns generation, it flows from the parts where the fetus develops. Through menstrual blood is expressed the horror inspired in man by woman's fecundity.

One of the most rigorous taboos forbids all sexual relations with a woman in a state of menstrual impurity. In various cultures offenders have themselves been considered impure for certain periods, or they have been required to undergo severe penance; it has been supposed that masculine energy and vitality would be destroyed because the feminine principle is then at its maximum of force. More vaguely, man finds it repugnant to come upon the dreaded essence of the mother in the woman he possesses; he is determined to dissociate these two aspects of femininity. Hence the universal law prohibiting incest,[1] expressed in the rule of exogamy or in more modern forms; this is why man tends to keep away from woman at the times when she is especially taken up with her reproductive role: during her menses, when she is pregnant, in lactation. The Oedipus complex—which should be redescribed—does not deny this attitude, but on the contrary implies it. Man is on the defensive against woman in so far as she represents the vague source of the world and obscure organic development.

It is in this guise also, however, that woman enables her group, separated from the cosmos and the gods, to remain in communication with them. Today she still assures the fertility of the fields among the Bedouins and the Iroquois; in ancient Greece she heard the subterranean voices; she caught the language of winds and trees: she was Pythia, sibyl, prophetess; the dead and the gods spoke through her mouth. She keeps today these powers of divination: she is medium, reader of palms and cards, chairvoyant, inspired; she hears voices, sees apparitions. When men feel the need to plunge again into the midst of plant and animal life—as Antaeus touched the earth to renew his strength—they make appeal to woman. All

[1] According to the view of a sociologist, G. P. MURDOCK, in *Social Structure* (Macmillan, 1949), incest prohibition can be fully accounted for only by a complex theory, involving factors contributed by psychoanalysis, sociology, cultural anthropology, and behaviouristic psychology. No simple explanation, like 'instinct', or 'familiar association', or 'fear of inbreeding', is at all satisfactory.—TR.

through the rationalist civilizations of Greece and Rome the underworld cults continued to exist. They were ordinarily marginal to the official religious life ; they even took on in the end, as at Eleusis, the form of mysteries: their meaning was opposite to that of the solar cults in which man asserted his will to independence and spirituality ; but they were complementary to them ; man sought to escape from his solitude through ecstasy: that was the end and aim of the mysteries, the orgies, the bacchanals. In a world reconquered by the males, it was a male god, Dionysus, who usurped the wild and magical power of Ishtar, of Astarte ; but still they were women who revelled madly around his image: maenads, thyiads, bacchantes summoned the men to holy drunkenness, to sacred frenzy. Religious prostitution played a similar part: it was a matter at once of unloosing and channelling the powers of fecundity. Popular festivals today are still marked by outbursts of eroticism ; woman appears here not simply as an object of pleasure, but as a means for attaining to that state of *hybris*, riotousness, in which the individual exceeds the bounds of self. 'What a human being possesses deep within him of the lost, of the tragic, of the "blinding wonder" can be found again nowhere but in bed,' writes G. Bataille.

In the erotic release, man embraces the loved one and seeks to lose himself in the infinite mystery of the flesh. But we have seen that, on the contrary, his normal sexuality tends to dissociate Mother from Wife. He feels repugnance for the mysterious alchemies of life, whereas his own life is nourished and delighted with the savoury fruits of earth ; he wishes to take them for his own ; he covets Venus newly risen from the wave. Woman is disclosed first as wife in the patriarchate, since the supreme creator is male. Before being the mother of the human race, Eve was Adam's companion ; she was given to man so that he might possess her and fertilize her as he owns and fertilizes the soil ; and through her he makes all nature his realm. It is not only a subjective and fleeting pleasure that man seeks in the sexual act. He wishes to conquer, to take, to possess ; to have woman is to conquer her ; he penetrates into her as the ploughshare into the furrow ; he makes her his even as he makes his the land he works ; he labours, he plants, he sows: these images are old as writing ; from antiquity to our own day a thousand examples could be cited: 'Woman is like the field, and man is like the seed,' says the law of Manu. In a drawing by André Masson there is a man with a spade in hand, spading the garden of a woman's

vulva.[1] Woman is her husband's prey, his possession.

The male's hesitation between fear and desire, between the fear of being in the power of uncontrollable forces and the wish to win them over, is strikingly reflected in the myth of Virginity. Now feared by the male, now desired or even demanded, the virgin would seem to represent the most consummate form of the feminine mystery ; she is therefore its most disturbing and at the same time its most fascinating aspect. According to whether man feels himself overwhelmed by the encircling forces or proudly believes himself capable of taking control of them, he declines or demands to have his wife delivered to him a virgin. In the most primitive societies where woman's power is great it is fear that rules him ; it is proper for the woman to be deflorated before the wedding night. Marco Polo states of the Tibetans that 'none of them would want to take to wife a girl that was a virgin'. This refusal has sometimes been explained in a rational way: man would not want a wife who had not already aroused masculine desires. The Arab geographer El Bekri, speaking of the Slavs, reports that 'if a man marries and finds his wife a virgin, he says to her: "If you were any good, men would have made love to you and one would have taken your virginity." Then he drives her out and repudiates her'. It is claimed, even, that some primitives will take in marriage only a woman who has already been a mother, thus giving proof of her fecundity.

But the true motives underlying these widespread customs of defloration are mystical. Certain peoples imagine that there is a serpent in the vagina which would bite the husband just as the hymen is broken ; some ascribe frightful powers to virginal blood, related to menstrual blood and likewise capable of ruining the man's vigour. Through such imagery is expressed the idea that the feminine principle has the more strength, is more menacing, when it is intact.[2]

There are cases where the question of defloration is not raised ; for example, among the Trobriand Islanders described by Malinowski, the girls are never virgins because sexual play is permitted from infancy. In certain cultures the mother, the older sister, or some matron systematically deflowers the

[1] Rabelais calls the male sex organ 'nature's ploughman'. We have noted the religious and historical origin of the associations: phallus-ploughshare and woman-furrow.

[2] Thence comes the strength in combat attributed to virgins: for example, the Valkyries and the Maid of Orléans.

young girl and throughout her childhood enlarges the vaginal orifice. Again, the defloration may be performed at puberty, the women making use of a stick, a bone, or a stone and regarding it merely as a surgical operation. In other tribes the girl is subjected at puberty to a savage initiation: men drag her outside the village and deflower her by violation or by means of objects. A common rite consists in offering the virgins to strangers passing through—whether it is thought that they are not allergic to a mana dangerous only to males of the tribe, or whether it is a matter of indifference what evils are let loose on strangers. Still more often it is the priest, or the medicine man, or the cacique, the tribal chieftain, who deflowers the bride during the night before the wedding. On the Malabar Coast the Brahmans are charged with this duty, which they are said to perform without pleasure and for which they lay claim to good pay. It is well known that all sacred objects are dangerous for the profane, but that consecrated individuals can handle them without risk; it is understandable, then, that priests and chiefs can conquer the maleficent forces against which the husband must be protected. In Rome only a symbolic ceremony remained as a vestige of such customs; the fiancée was seated on the phallus of a stone Priapus, which served the double purpose supposedly of increasing her fecundity and absorbing the too powerful—and for that reason evil—fluids with which she was charged. The husband may protect himself in still another way: he deflowers the virgin himself, but in the midst of ceremonies that at the critical moment make him invulnerable; for instance, he may operate with a stick or a bone in the presence of the whole village. In Samoa he uses his finger wrapped in a white cloth, which is torn into bloody bits and these distributed to the persons present. Or the husband may be allowed to deflower his wife in normal fashion, but is not to ejaculate inside her for three days, so that the generative germ may not be contaminated by the hymeneal blood.

Through a transvaluation that is classical in the realm of the sacred, virginal blood becomes in less primitive societies a propitious symbol. There still are villages in France where, on the morning after the wedding, the bloodstained sheets are displayed before relatives and friends. What happened is that in the patriarchal regime man became master of woman; and the very powers that are frightening in wild beasts or in unconquered elements became qualities valuable to the owner able to domesticate them. From the fire of the wild horse, the

violence of lightning and cataracts, man has made means to prosperity. And so he wishes to take possession of the woman intact in all her richness. Rational motives play a part, no doubt, in the demand for virtue imposed on the young girl: like the chastity of the wife, the innocence of the fiancée is necessary so that the father may run no risk, later, of leaving his property to a child of another. But virginity is demanded for more immediate reasons when a man regards his wife as his personal property. In the first place, it is always impossible to realize positively the idea of possession ; in truth, one never has any thing or any person ; one tries then to establish ownership in negative fashion. The surest way of asserting that something is mine is to prevent others from using it. And nothing seems to a man to be more desirable than what has never belonged to any human being: then the conquest seems like a unique and absolute event. Virgin lands have always fascinated explorers ; mountain-climbers are killed each year because they wish to violate an untouched peak or even because they have merely tried to open a new trail up its side ; and the curious risk their lives to descend underground into the depths of unexplored caverns. An object that men have already used has become an instrument ; cut from its natural ties, it loses its most profound properties: there is more promise in the untamed flow of torrents than in the water of public fountains.

A virgin body has the freshness of secret springs, the morning sheen of an unopened flower, the orient lustre of a pearl on which the sun has never shone. Grotto, temple, sanctuary, secret garden—man, like the child, is fascinated by enclosed and shadowy places not yet animated by any consciousness, which wait to be given a soul: what he alone is to take and to penetrate seems to be in truth created by him. And more, one of the ends sought by all desire is the using up of the desired object, which implies its destruction. In breaking the hymen man takes possession of the feminine body more intimately than by a penetration that leaves it intact ; in the irreversible act of defloration he makes of that body unequivocally a passive object, he affirms his capture of it. This idea is expressed precisely in the legend of the knight who pushed his way with difficulty through thorny bushes to pick a rose of hitherto unbreathed fragrance ; he not only found it, but broke the stem, and it was then that he made it his own. The image is so clear that in popular language to 'take her flower' from a woman means to destroy her virginity ; and

this expression, of course, has given origin to the word 'defloration'.

But virginity has this erotic attraction only if it is in alliance with youth ; otherwise its mystery again becomes disturbing. Many men of today feel a sexual repugnance in the presence of maidenhood too prolonged ; and it is not only psychological causes that are supposed to make 'old maids' mean and embittered females. The curse is in their flesh itself, that flesh which is object for no subject, which no man's desire has made desirable, which has bloomed and faded without finding a place in the world of men ; turned from its proper destination, it becomes an oddity, as disturbing as the incommunicable thought of a madman. Speaking of a woman of forty, still beautiful, but presumably virgin, I have heard a man say coarsely: 'It must be full of spiderwebs inside.' And, in truth, cellars and attics, no longer entered, of no use, become full of unseemly mystery ; phantoms will likely haunt them ; abandoned by people, houses become the abode of spirits. Unless feminine virginity has been dedicated to a god, one easily believes that it implies some kind of marriage with the demon. Virgins unsubdued by man, old women who have escaped his power, are more easily than others regarded as sorceresses ; for the lot of woman being bondage to another, if she escapes the yoke of man she is ready to accept that of the devil.

Freed from evil spirits by defloration rites or purified through her virginity, as the case may be, the new wife may well seem a most desirable prey. Embracing her, it is all the riches of life that the lover would possess. She is the whole fauna, the whole flora of the earth ; gazelle and doe, lilies and roses, downy peach, perfumed berry, she is precious stones, nacre, agate, pearl, silk, the blue of the sky, the cool water of springs, air, flame, land and sea. Poets of East and West have metamorphosed woman's body into flowers, fruits, birds. Here again, from the writings of antiquity, the Middle Ages, and modern times, what might well be cited would make an abundant anthology. Who does not know the Song of Songs? The lover says to his love:

Thou hast doves' eyes . . .
Thy hair is as a flock of goats . . .
Thy teeth are like a flock of sheep that are even shorn . . .
Thy temples are like a piece of a pomegranate . . .
Thy two breasts are like two young roes . . .
Honey and milk are under thy tongue. . . .

In *Arcane 17,* André Breton resumes the eternal canticle: 'Mélusine at the moment of the second cry: she has sprung up from her slender haunches, her belly is all the wheat of August, her torso flares up like fireworks from her curved waist, moulded after the two wings of the swallow; her breasts are ermines taken at the very moment of their natural cry, blinding the beholder with the brightness of the ardent coals of their burning mouths. And her arms are the twin souls of streams that sing and perfume. . . .'

Man finds again in woman bright stars and dreamy moon, the light of the sun, the shade of grottoes; and, conversely, the wild flowers of thickets, the proud garden rose are woman. Nymphs, dryads, sirens, undines, fairies haunt the fields and woods, the lakes, oceans, moorland. Nothing lies deeper in the hearts of men than this animism. For the sailor, the sea is a woman, dangerous, treacherous, hard to conquer, but cherished the more for his effort to subdue her. The proud mountain, rebellious, virginal, and wicked, is a woman for the alpinist who wills, at the peril of his life, to violate her. It is sometimes asserted that these comparisons reveal sexual sublimation; but rather they express an affinity between woman and the elements that is as basic as sexuality itself. Man expects something other than the assuagement of instinctive cravings from the possession of a woman: she is the privileged object through which he subdues Nature. But other objects can play this part. Sometimes man seeks to find again upon the body of young boys the sandy shore, the velvet night, the scent of honeysuckle. But sexual penetration is not the only manner of accomplishing carnal possession of the earth. In his novel *To a God Unknown,* Steinbeck presents a man who has chosen a mossy rock as mediator between himself and nature; in *Chatte,* Colette describes a young husband who has centred his love on his favourite cat, because, through this wild and gentle animal, he has a grasp on the sensual universe which the too human body of his wife fails to give him. The Other can be incarnated in the sea, the mountain, as perfectly as in woman; they oppose to man the same passive and unforeseen resistance that enables him to fulfil himself; they are an unwillingness to overcome, a prey to take possession of. If sea and mountain are women, then woman is also sea and mountain for her lover.[1]

[1] A significant phrase of Samivel is cited by BACHELARD (*La Terre et les rêveries de la volonté*): 'These mountains lying around me in a circle I have ceased little by little to regard as enemies

But it is not casually given to any woman whatever to serve in this way as intermediary between man and the world; man is not satisfied merely to find in his partner sex organs complementary to his own. She must incarnate the marvellous flowering of life and at the same time conceal its obscure mysteries. Before all things, then, she will be called upon for youth and health, for as man presses a living creature in his embrace, he can find enchantment in her only if he forgets that death ever dwells in life. And he asks for still more: that his loved one be beautiful. The ideal of feminine beauty is variable, but certain demands remain constant; for one thing, since woman is destined to be possessed, her body must present the inert and passive qualities of an object. Virile beauty lies in the fitness of the body for action, in strength, agility, flexibility; it is the manifestation of transcendence animating a flesh that must never sink back upon itself. The feminine ideal is symmetrical only in such societies as Sparta, Fascist Italy, and Nazi Germany, which destine woman for the State and not for the individual, which regard her exclusively as mother and make no place for eroticism.

But when woman is given over to man as his property, he demands that she represent the flesh purely for its own sake. Her body is not perceived as the radiation of a subjective personality, but as a thing sunk deeply in its own immanence; it is not for such a body to have reference to the rest of the world, it must not be the promise of things other than itself: it must end the desire it arouses. The most naive form of this requirement is the Hottentot ideal of the steatopygous Venus, for the buttocks are the part of the body with fewest nerves, where the flesh seems an aimless fact. The taste of Orientals for fat women is of similar nature; they love the absurd richness of this adipose proliferation, enlivened as it is by no project, with no meaning other than simply to be there.[2] Even

to fight, as females to trample upon, or as trophies to conquer so as to provide for myself and for others true witness of my own worth.' The ambivalence woman-mountain is established through the common idea of 'enemy to fight', 'trophy', and 'witness' of power.

[2] 'The Hottentots, among whom steatopygy is neither as developed nor as usual as with the female Bushman, regard this conformation as of aesthetic value, and they knead the buttocks of their girls from infancy to develop them. Similarly the artificial fattening of woman—a veritable stuffing, the two essential features of which are immobility and abundant ingestion of appropriate foods, particularly milk—is met with in various parts of Africa. It

in civilizations where sensuality is more subtle and ideas of form and harmony are entertained, the breasts and the buttocks remain favoured objects, because of their unnecessary, gratuitous blooming.

Costumes and styles are often devoted to cutting off the feminine body from any activity: Chinese women with bound feet could scarcely walk, the polished fingernails of the Hollywood star deprive her of her hands; high heels, corsets, panniers, farthingales, crinolines were intended less to accentuate the curves of the feminine body than to augment its incapacity. Weighted down with fat, or on the contrary so thin as to forbid all effort, paralysed by inconvenient clothing and by the rules of propriety—then woman's body seems to man to be his property, his thing. Make-up and jewellery also further this petrification of face and body. The function of ornamental attire is very complex; with certain primitives it has a religious significance; but more often its purpose is to accomplish the metamorphosis of woman into idol. Ambiguous idol! Man wishes her to be carnal, her beauty like that of fruits and flowers; but he would also have her smooth, hard, changeless as a pebble. The function of ornament is to make her share more intimately in nature and at the same time to remove her from the natural, it is to lend to palpitating life the rigour of artifice.

Woman becomes plant, panther, diamond, mother-of-pearl, by blending flowers, furs, jewels, shells, feathers with her body; she perfumes herself to spread an aroma of the lily and the rose. But feathers, silk, pearls, and perfumes serve also to hide the animal crudity of her flesh, her odour. She paints her mouth and her cheeks to give them the solid fixity of a mask; her glance she imprisons deep in kohl and mascara, it is no more than the iridescent ornament of her eyes; her hair, braided, curled, shaped, loses its disquieting plant-like mystery.

In woman dressed and adorned, nature is present but under restraint, by human will remoulded nearer to man's desire. A woman is rendered more desirable to the extent that nature is more highly developed in her and more rigorously confined: it is the 'sophisticated' woman who has always been the ideal erotic object. And the taste for a more natural beauty is often only a specious form of sophistication. Remy de Gour-

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is still practised by the well-off Arab and Israelite citizen of Algeria, Tunis, and Morocco.' (LUQUET, 'Les Vénus des cavernes', *Journal de Psychologie,* 1934.)

mont wanted woman to wear her hair down, rippling free as brooks and prairie grasses ; but it would be on a sophisticated arrangement and not on an unkempt mop really left to nature that one could caress the undulations of water and grain fields. The younger and healthier a woman and the more her new and shining body seems endowed with everlasting freshness, the less useful artifice is to her ; but it is always needful to conceal from the man the carnal weakness of the prey he clasps and the deterioration that threatens it. Because he fears her contingent destiny, because he fancies her changeless, necessary, man seeks to find on the face of woman, on her body and limbs, the exact expression of an ideal. Among primitive peoples this ideal is only that of the perfection of the popular type: a race with thick lips and a flat nose constructs a Venus with thick lips and flat nose ; in later periods the canons of a more complex aesthetics are applied to women. But, in any case, the more the features and proportions of a woman seem contrived, the more she rejoices the heart of man because she seems to escape the vicissitudes of natural things. We come, then, to this strange paradox: man, wishing to find nature in woman, but nature transfigured, dooms woman to artifice. She is not only *physis* but quite as much *anti-physis* ; and this not only in the civilization of electrical 'perms', of superfluous-hair removal by means of wax, of latex girdles, but also in the land of Negresses with lip disks, in China and indeed all over the world.

Swift denounced this mystification in his famous *Ode to Celia* ; he describes with disgust the paraphernalia of the coquette and recalls with disgust the animal necessities of her body. He is twice wrong in his indignation ; for man wishes simultaneously that woman be animal and plant and that she be hidden behind an artificial front ; he loves her rising from the sea and emerging from a fashionable dressmaker's establishment, naked and dressed, naked under her clothes—such, precisely, as he finds her in the universe of humanity. The city man seeks animality in woman ; but for the young peasant, doing his military service, the whorehouse embodies all the magic of the city. Woman is field and pasture, but she is also Babylon.

However, this is woman's first lie, her first treason: namely, that of life itself—life which, though clothed in the most attractive forms, is always infested by the ferments of age and death. The very use man makes of woman destroys her most precious powers: weighed down by maternities, she loses her

erotic attraction ; even when she is sterile, the mere passage of time alters her charms. Infirm, homely, old, woman is repellent. She is said to be withered, faded, as might be said of a plant. To be sure, in man, too, decrepitude is terrifying ; but normally man does not experience older men as flesh ; he has only an abstract unity with these separate and strange bodies. It is upon woman's body—this body which is destined for him—that man really encounters the deterioration of the flesh. It is through man's hostile eyes that Villon's *belle heaulmière* contemplates the degradation of her body. The old woman, the homely woman, are not merely objects without allure—they arouse hatred mingled with fear. In them reappears the disquieting figure of the Mother, when once the charms of the Wife have vanished.

But even the Wife is dangerous prey. In Venus risen from the wave—fresh foam, blond harvest—Demeter survives ; when man takes possession of woman through the pleasure he gets from her, he also awakens in her the dubious power of fecundity : the organ he penetrates is the same as that which gives birth to the child. This is why in all societies man is protected by many taboos against the dangers of the female sex. The opposite is not true, woman has nothing to fear from the male ; his sex is regarded as secular, profane. The phallus can be raised to the dignity of a god ; but in his worship there is no element of terror, and in the course of daily life woman has no need of being mystically defended against him ; he is always propitious. It is remarkable, too, that in many matrilineal societies a very free sexuality exists ; but this is true only during woman's childhood, in her first youth, when coition is not connected with the idea of reproduction. Malinowski relates with some astonishment that young people who sleep together freely in the 'bachelors' house' readily proclaim their amours ; the fact is that the unmarried girl is regarded as unable to bear offspring, and the sexual act is therefore considered to be simply a calm secular pleasure. Once a woman is married, on the contrary, her husband must give her no signs of affection in public, he must not touch her ; and any allusion to their intimate relations is sacrilege : she has then come to share in the fearful essence of the mother, and coition has become a sacred act. Thenceforth it is surrounded with prohibitions and precautions. Coition is forbidden at the time of cultivation of the land, the sowing seeds, the setting of plants ; in this case, it is to avoid wasting in relations between individuals the fecundating forces necessary for thriving crops

and therefore for community welfare; it is out of respect for the powers concerned with fecundity that economy is here enjoined. But for the most part continence protects the manly strength of the husband; it is required when the man is to depart for fishing or hunting, and especially when he prepares for war. In uniting with woman the male principle is enfeebled, and the man must therefore avoid union whenever he needs to maintain his strength entire.

It is a question whether the horror inspired in man by woman comes from that inspired by sexuality in general, or vice versa. It is noteworthy that, in Leviticus particularly, nocturnal emission is regarded as a defilement, though woman is not concerned in it. And in our modern societies masturbation is popularly regarded as a danger and a sin: many children and young people who are addicts practise it only with horrible fear and anguish. It is the interference of society and particularly of parents that makes a vice of solitary pleasure; but more than one young boy has been spontaneously frightened by his ejaculations: blood or semen, any flowing away of his own substance seems to him disquieting; it is his life, his mana that is escaping. However, even if a man can subjectively go through erotic experiences without woman being present, she is objectively implied in his sexuality: as Plato says in the myth of the Androgynes, the organism of the male supposes that of the female. Man discovers woman in discovering his own sex, even if she is present neither in flesh and blood nor in imagery; and inversely it is in so far as she incarnates sexuality that woman is redoubtable. We can never separate the immanent and the transcendent aspects of living experience: what I fear or desire is always an embodiment of my own existence, but nothing happens to me except it comes through what is not me. The non-ego is implied in nocturnal emissions, in erections, if not definitely under the form of woman, at least as Nature and Life: the individual feels himself to be possessed by a magic not of himself.

Indeed, the ambivalence of his feelings towards woman reappears in his attitude towards his own sex organ: he is proud of it, he laughs at it, he is ashamed of it. The little boy challenges comparison of his penis with those of his comrades: his first erection fills him with pride and fright at once. The grown man regards his organ as a symbol of transcendence and power; it pleases his vanity like a voluntary muscle and at the same time like a magical gift: it is a liberty rich in all the contingency of the fact given yet freely wished; it is under this

contradictory aspect that he is enchanted with it, but he is suspicious of deception. That organ by which he thought to assert himself does not obey him; heavy with unsatisfied desires, unexpectedly becoming erect, sometimes relieving itself during sleep, it manifests a suspect and capricious vitality. Man aspires to make Spirit triumph over Life, action over passivity; his consciousness keeps nature at a distance, his will shapes her, but in his sex organ he finds himself again beset with life, nature, and passivity.

'The sexual organs,' writes Schopenhauer, 'are the true seat of the will, of which the opposite pole is the brain.' What he calls 'will' is attachment to life, which is suffering and death, while 'the brain' is thought, which is detached from life in imagining it. Sexual shame, according to him, is the shame we feel before our stupid infatuation with the carnal. Even if we take exception to the pessimism of his theories, he is right in seeing in the opposition: sex versus brain, the expression of man's duality. As subject, he poses the world, and remaining outside this posed universe, he makes himself ruler of it; if he views himself as flesh, as sex, he is no longer an independent consciousness, a clear, free being: he is involved with the world, he is a limited and perishable object. And no doubt the generative act passes beyond the frontiers of the body; but at the same moment it establishes them. The penis, father of generations, corresponds to the maternal womb; arising from a germ that grew in woman's body, man is himself a carrier of germs, and through the sowing which gives life, it is his own life that is renounced. 'The birth of children,' says Hegel, 'is the death of parents.' The ejaculation is a promise of death, it is an assertion of the species against the individual; the existence of the sex organ and its activity deny the proud singularity of the subject. It is this contesting of life against spirit that makes the organ scandalous. Man glories in the phallus when he thinks of it as transcendence and activity, as a means for taking possession of the other; but he is ashamed of it when he sees it as merely passive flesh through which he is the plaything of the dark forces of Life. This shame is readily concealed in irony. The sex organ of another easily arouses laughter; erection often seems ridiculous, because it seems like an intended action but is really involuntary, and the mere presence of the genital organs, when it is referred to, evokes mirth. Malinowski relates that for the savages among whom he was living it was sufficient to mention the name of the 'shameful parts' to arouse inextinguishable laugh-

ter ; many jokes called Rabelaisian or 'smutty' go hardly beyond this rudimentary word play. Among certain primitives the women are given the right, during the days consecrated to weeding the gardens, to violate brutally any stranger who ventures near ; they attack him all together and frequently leave him half-dead. The men of the tribe laugh at this exploit ; by this violation the victim has been made passive and dependent flesh ; he has been possessed by the women, and through them by their husbands ; whereas in normal coition man wishes to establish himself as the possessor.

But just here he will learn—with the best of evidence—the ambiguity of his carnal situation. He takes great pride in his sexuality only in so far as it is a means of appropriating the Other—and this dream of possession ends only in frustration. In authentic possession the other is abolished as such, it is consumed and destroyed: only the Sultan in *The Arabian Nights* has the power to cut off each mistress's head when dawn has come to take her from his couch. Woman survives man's embraces, and in that very fact she escapes him ; as soon as he loosens his arms, his prey becomes again a stranger to him ; there she lies, new, intact, ready to be possessed by a new lover in as ephemeral a manner. One of the male's dreams is to 'brand' the woman in such a way that she will remain for ever his ; but the most arrogant well knows that he will never leave with her anything more than memories and that the most ardent recollections are cold in comparison with an actual, present sensation. A whole literature has expatiated upon this frustration. It is made objective in woman, and she is called inconstant and traitress because her body is such as to dedicate her to man in general and not to one man in particular.

But her treason is more perfidious still: she makes her lover in truth her prey. Only a body can touch another body ; the male masters the flesh he longs for only in becoming flesh himself ; Eve is given to Adam so that through her he may accomplish his transcendence, and she draws him into the night of immanence. His mistress, in the vertigoes of pleasure, encloses him again in the opaque clay of that dark matrix which the mother fabricated for her son and from which he desires to escape. He wishes to possess her: behold him the possessed himself! Odour, moisture, fatigue, ennui—a library of books has described this gloomy passion of a consciousness made flesh. Desire, which frequently shrouds disgust, reveals disgust again when it is satisfied. It has been said: '*Post coitum*

*homo animal triste.*' And again: '*La chair est triste.*' And yet man has not even found final satisfaction in his loved one's arms. Soon desire is reborn in him ; and frequently this is not merely desire for woman in general, but for this particular one. Now she wields a power that is peculiarly disquieting. For, in his own body, man feels the sexual need only as a general need analogous to hunger and thirst, a need without particular object: the bond that holds him to this especial feminine body has, then, been forged by the Other. It is a bond as mysterious as the impure and fertile abdomen where it has its roots, a kind of passive force: it is magic.

The threadbare vocabulary of the serial novels describing woman as a sorceress, an enchantress, fascinating and casting a spell over man, reflects the most ancient and universal of myths. Woman is dedicated to magic. Alain said that magic is spirit drooping down among things ; an action is magical when, instead of being produced by an agent, it emanates from something passive. Just so men have always regarded woman as the immanence of what is given ; if she produces harvests and children, it is not by an act of her will ; she is not subject, transcendence, creative power, but an object charged with fluids. In the societies where man worships these mysteries, woman, on account of these powers, is associated with religion and venerated as priestess ; but when man struggles to make society triumph over nature, reason over life, and the will over the inert, given nature of things, then woman is regarded as a sorceress. The difference between a priest and a magician is well known: the first controls and directs forces he has mastered in accord with the gods and the laws, for the common good, in the name of all members of the group ; the magician operates apart from society, against the gods and the laws, according to his own deep interests. Now, woman is not fully integrated into the world of men ; as the other, she is opposed to them. It is natural for her to use the power she has, not to spread through the community of men and into the future the bold emprise of transcendence, but, being apart, opposed, to drag the males into the solitude of separation, into the shades of immanence. Woman is the siren whose song lures sailors upon the rocks ; she is Circe, who changes her lovers into beasts, the undine who draws fishermen into the depths of pools. The man captivated by her charms no longer has will-power, enterprise, future ; he is no longer a citizen, but mere flesh enslaved to its desires, cut off from the community, bound to the moment,

tossed passively back and forth between torture and pleasure. The perverse sorceress arrays passion against duty, the present moment against all time to come; she detains the traveller far from home, she pours for him the drink of forgetfulness.

Seeking to appropriate the Other, man must remain himself; but in the frustration of impossible possession he tries to become that other with whom he fails to be united; then he is alienated, he is lost, he drinks the philtre that makes him a stranger to himself, he plunges into the depths of fleeting and deadly waters. The Mother dooms her son to death in giving him life; the loved one lures her lover on to renounce life and abandon himself to the last sleep. The bond that unites Love and Death is poignantly illuminated in the legend of Tristan, but it has a deeper truth. Born of the flesh, the man in love finds fulfilment as flesh, and the flesh is destined to the tomb. Here the alliance between Woman and Death is confirmed; the great harvestress is the inverse aspect of the fecundity that makes the grain thrive. But she appears, too, as the dreadful bride whose skeleton is revealed under her sweet, mendacious flesh.[1]

Thus what man cherishes and detests first of all in woman —loved one or mother—is the fixed image of his animal destiny; it is the life that is necessary to his existence but that condemns him to the finite and to death. From the day of his birth man begins to die: this is the truth incarnated in the Mother. In procreation he speaks for the species against himself; he learns this in his wife's embrace; in excitement and pleasure, even before he has engendered, he forgets his unique ego. Although he endeavours to distinguish mother and wife, he gets from both a witness to one thing only: his mortal state. He wishes to venerate his mother and love his mistress; at the same time he rebels against them in disgust and fear.

Many attitudes are possible for the man, as he puts emphasis on one or another aspect of the fleshly drama. If a man does not feel that life is unique, if he is not much concerned with his peculiar destiny, if he does not fear death, he will joyfully accept his animality. Among the Moslems woman is reduced to an abject condition because of the feudal structure of society, which does not permit appeal to the State against the family, and because of the religion, which, expressing the war-like ideals of that civilization, has dedicated man

[1] For example, in PREVERT'S ballet *Le Rendez-vous* and COCTEAU'S *Le Jeune Homme et lo Mort,* Death is represented in the form of a beloved young girl.

directly to Death and has deprived woman of her magic. What should he fear on earth, he who is prepared at any moment to be plunged into the voluptuous orgies of the Mohammedan paradise? Man can in such case tranquilly enjoy woman without needing to be defended either from himself or from her. The tales of *The Arabian Nights* represent woman as a source of soothing delights, in the same way as are fruits, preserves, rich cakes, and perfumed oils. We find today that same sensual benevolence among many Mediterranean peoples: preoccupied with the moment, not aspiring to immortality, the man of the Midi, who through the brightness of sky and sea sees Nature under her favouring aspect, will love women with the gourmand's relish. By tradition he scorns them enough to prevent his regarding them as persons: he hardly differentiates between the pleasantness of their bodies and that of sand and wave; he feels no horror of the flesh either in them or in himself. Vittorini says in *In Sicily* that at the age of seven he discovered the naked body of woman with tranquil astonishment. The rationalist thought of Greece and Rome supports this easy attitude. The optimistic philosophy of the Greeks went beyond the Pythagorean Manichaeism; the inferior is subordinated to the superior and thus is useful to him. These harmonious ideologies manifest no hostility to the flesh whatever. Oriented towards the heaven of Ideas, or towards the City or the State, the individual regarding himself as Spirit (Nous) or as citizen considered that he had risen above his animal nature; whether he abandoned himself to pleasure or practised asceticism, woman, solidly integrated in male society, had only a secondary importance. To be sure, rationalism never triumphed completely and the erotic experience kept in these civilizations its ambivalent character: rites, mythology, literature attest this. But the attractions and the dangers of femininity were manifested in weakened form only.

It is Christianity which invests woman anew with frightening prestige: fear of the other sex is one of the forms assumed by the anguish of man's uneasy conscience. The Christian is divided within himself; the separation of body and soul, of life and spirit, is complete; original sin makes of the body the enemy of the soul; all ties of the flesh seem evil.[1] Only as

[1] Up to the end of the twelfth century the theologians, except St. Anselm, considered that according to the doctrine of St. Augustine original sin is involved in the very law of generation: 'Concupiscence is a vice . . . human flesh born through it is a sinful

redeemed by Christ and directed towards the kingdom of heaven can man be saved ; but originally he is only corruption ; his birth dooms him not only to death but to damnation ; it is by divine Grace that heaven can be opened to him, but in all the forms of his natural existence there is a curse. Evil is an absolute reality ; and the flesh is sin. And of course, since woman remains always the Other, it is not held that reciprocally male and female are both flesh: the flesh that is for the Christian the hostile *Other* is precisely woman. In her the Christian finds incarnated the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil. All the Fathers of the Church insist on the idea that she led Adam into sin. We must quote Tertullian again: 'Woman! You are the gateway of the devil. You persuaded him whom the devil dared not attack directly. Because of you the Son of God had to die. You should always go dressed in mourning and in rags.' All Christian literature strives to enhance the disgust that man can feel for woman. Tertullian defines her as *'templum oedificatum super cloacam'* ('a temple built over a sewer'). St. Augustine called attention with horror to the obscene commingling of the sexual and excretory organs: *'Inter faeces et urinam nascimur'* ('We are born between feces and urine.') The aversion of Christianity in the matter of the feminine body is such that while it is willing to doom its God to an ignominious death, it spares Him the defilement of being born: the Council of Ephesus in the Eastern Church and the Lateran Council in the West declare the virgin birth of Christ. The first Fathers of the Church—Origen, Tertullian, and Jerome—thought Mary had been brought to bed in blood and filth like other women ; but the opinion of St. Ambrose and St. Augustine was the one that prevailed. The body of the Virgin remained closed. Since the Middle Ages the fact of having a body has been considered, in woman, an ignominy. Even science was long paralysed by this disgust. Linnaeus in his treatise on nature avoided as 'abominable' the study of woman's sexual organs. The French physician des Laurens asked himself the scandalized question: 'How can this divine animal, full of reason and judgment, which we call man, be attracted by these obscene parts of woman, defiled with juices and located shamefully at the lowest part of the trunk?'

Today many other influences interfere with that of

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flesh,' writes St. Augustine. And St. Thomas: 'The union of the sexes transmits original sin to the child, being accompanied, since the Fall, by concupiscence.'

Christian thought; and this has itself a number of aspects. But, in the Puritan world among others, hate of the flesh continues to exist; it is expressed, for example, in Faulkner's *Light in August*; the initial sexual adventures of the hero are terribly traumatic. Throughout literature it is common to show a young man upset to the point of nausea after his first coition; and if in actuality such a reaction is very rare, it is not by chance that it is so often described. Especially in Anglo-Saxon countries, which are steeped in Puritanism, woman arouses in most adolescents and in many men a terror more or less openly admitted. The feeling exists rather strongly in France. Michel Leiris writes in his *Age d'homme*; 'At present I tend to regard the feminine organ as something unclean or as a wound, not less attractive on that account, but dangerous in itself, like everything bloody, mucous, infected.' The idea of venereal disease expresses these fears. Woman causes fright not because she gives diseases; the truth is that the diseases seem abominable because they come from woman: I have been told of young people who imagine that too frequent intercourse is enough to give gonorrhoea. It is a common belief also that on account of coition a man loses his muscular strength and his clearheadedness, and that his phosphorus is used up and his sensitivity is dulled. True enough, masturbation implies these same dangers; and society even considers it, for moral reasons, as more injurious than the normal sexual function. Legitimate marriage and the wish to have children are protective against the bad effects of eroticism. But I have already said that in every sexual act the Other is implicated; and the Other most often wears the visage of woman. With her, man senses most definitely the passivity of his own flesh. Woman is vampire, she eats and drinks him; her organ feeds gluttonously upon his. Certain psychoanalysts have attempted to provide scientific support for these fancies, suggesting that all the pleasure woman gets from intercourse might come from the fact that she symbolically castrates him and takes possession of his penis. But it would seem that these theories should themselves be submitted to psychoanalysis. and it is likely that the physicians who invent them are engaged in projecting their own ancestral terrors.

The source of these terrors lies in the fact that in the Other, quite beyond reach, alterity, otherness, abides. In patriarchal societies woman retains many of the disquieting powers she possessed in primitive societies. That is why she is never left to Nature, but is surrounded with taboos, purified by rites,

placed in charge of priests; man is adjured never to approach her in her primitive nakedness, but through ceremonials and sacraments, which draw her away from the earth and the flesh and change her into a human creature; whereupon the magic she exercises is canalized, like the lightning since the invention of lightning conductors and electrical power plants. It even becomes possible to use her powers in the general interest; and here we see another phase in that oscillation which marks the relation of man to his female. He loves her to the extent that she is his, he fears her in so far as she remains the other; but it is as the fearsome other that he seeks to make her more profoundly his—and this is what will bring him to elevate her to the dignity of being a person and lead him to recognize in her a fellow creature.

Feminine magic was deeply domesticated in the patriarchal family. Woman gives society the opportunity of integrating the cosmic forces in her. In his work *Mitra-Varouna,* Dumézil points out that in India as in Rome there are two ways of displaying virile power: first, in Varuna and Romulus, in the Gandharvas and the Luperci, this power is aggression, rape, disorder, wanton violence; in this case woman appears as a being to be ravished, violated; the ravished Sabine women, apparently sterile, were lashed with whips of bull-hide, to compensate for too much violence by more violence. But, second and on the contrary, Mithra, Numa, the Brahmans, and the flamens (priests) stand for law and order in the city: in this case woman is bound to her husband in a marriage marked by elaborate rites, and, working with him, she gives him assurance of dominating all the female forces of nature; in Rome the priest of Jupiter resigned his position if his wife died. And likewise in Egypt, after Isis lost her supreme power as goddess mother, she remained nevertheless generous, smiling, kind, and good, the magnificent wife of Osiris. But when woman is thus the associate of man, complementary, his 'better half', she is of necessity endowed with a conscious ego, a soul. He could not depend so intimately upon a creature who did not share in the essence of humanity. As we have already noted, the Laws of Manu promised to the legitimate wife the same paradise as to her husband. The more the male becomes individualized and lays claim to his individuality, the more certainly he will recognize also in his companion an individual and a free being. The Oriental, care-

less of his own fate, is content with a female who is for him a means of enjoyment; but the dream of the Occidental, once he rises to consciousness of his own uniqueness, is to be taken cognizance of by another free being, at once strange and docile. The Greek never found the female imprisoned in the gynaeceum to be the fellow being he required, so he bestowed his love upon male companions whose flesh was informed like his with consciousness and freedom; or he gave his love to the hetairas, made almost his equals by their intelligence, culture, and wit. But when circumstances permit, it is the wife who can best satisfy man's demands. The Roman citizen recognized in the matron a person: in Cornelia, in Arria, he had his counterpart.

It was Christianity, paradoxically, that was to proclaim, on a certain plane, the equality of man and woman. In her, Christianity hates the flesh; if she renounces the flesh, she is God's creature, redeemed by the Saviour, no less than is man: she takes her place beside the men, among the souls assured of the joys of heaven. Men and women are both servants of God, almost as asexual as the angels and together, through grace, resistant to earthly temptations. If she agrees to deny her animality, woman--from the very fact that she is the incarnation of sin—will be also the most radiant incarnation of the triumph of the elect who have conquered sin.[1] Of course, the divine Saviour who effects the redemption of men is male; but mankind must co-operate in its own salvation, and it will be called upon to manifest its submissive good will in its most humiliated and perverse aspect. Christ is God; but it is a woman, the Virgin Mary, who reigns over all humankind. Yet only the marginal sects revive in woman the ancient privileges and powers of the great goddesses—the Church expresses and serves a patriarchal civilization in which it is meet and proper for woman to remain appended to man. It is through being his docile servant that she will be also a blessed saint. And thus at the heart of the Middle Ages arises the most highly perfected image of woman propitious to man: the countenance of the Mother of Christ is framed in glory. She is the inverse aspect of Eve the sinner; she crushes the serpent underfoot; she is the mediatrix of salvation, as Eve was of damnation.

It was as Mother that woman was fearsome; it is in maternity that she must be transfigured and enslaved. The virginity

[1] This explains the privileged place she occupies, for example, in Claudel's work.

of Mary has above all a negative value: that through which the flesh has been redeemed is not carnal; it has not been touched or possessed. Similarly the Asiatic Great Mother was not supposed to have a husband: she had engendered the world and reigned over it in solitary state; she could be wanton at her caprice, but her grandeur as Mother was not diminished by any wifely servitude. In the same way Mary knew not the stain of sexuality. Like the war-like Minerva, she is ivory tower, citadel, impregnable donjon. The priestesses of antiquity, like most Christian saints, were also virgin: woman consecrated to the good should be dedicated in the splendour of her intact strength; she should conserve in its unconquered integrity the essence of her femininity. If Mary's status as spouse be denied her, it is for the purpose of exalting the Woman Mother more purely in her. But she will be glorified only in accepting the subordinate role assigned to her. 'I am the servant of the Lord.' For the first time in human history the mother kneels before her son; she freely accepts her inferiority. This is the supreme masculine victory, consummated in the cult of the Virgin—it is the rehabilitation of woman through the accomplishment of her defeat. Ishtar, Astarte, Cybele were cruel, capricious, lustful; they were powerful. As much the source of death as of life, in giving birth to men they made men their slaves. Under Christianity life and death depend only upon God, and man, once out of the maternal body, has escaped that body for ever; the earth now awaits his bones only. For the destiny of his soul is played out in regions where the mother's powers are abolished; the sacrament of baptism makes ridiculous those ceremonies in which the placenta was burned or drowned. There is no longer any place on earth for magic: God alone is king. Nature, originally inimical, is through grace rendered powerless to harm. Maternity as a natural phenomenon confers no power. So there remains for woman, if she wishes to rise above her original fault, only to bow to the will of God, which subordinates her to man. And through this submission she can assume a new role in masculine mythology. Beaten down, trampled upon when she wished to dominate and as long as she had not definitely abdicated, she could be honoured as vassal. She loses none of her primitive attributes, but these are reversed in sign; from being of evil omen they become of good omen; black magic turns to white. As servant, woman is entitled to the most splendid deification.

And since woman has been subjected as Mother, she will

be cherished and respected first of all as Mother. Of the two ancient aspects of maternity, man today wishes to know only the smiling, attractive face. Limited in time and space, having but one body and one finite life, man is but a lone individual in the midst of a Nature and a History that are both foreign to him. Woman is similarly limited, and like man she is endowed with mind and spirit, but she belongs to Nature, the infinite current of Life flows through her ; she appears, therefore, as the mediatrix between the individual and the cosmos. When the mother has become a figure of reassurance and holiness, man naturally turns to her in love. Lost in nature, he seeks to escape ; but separated from her he wishes to go back. Established firmly in the family, in society, conforming to the laws and customs, the mother is the very incarnation of the Good: nature, to which she belongs in part, becomes good, no longer an enemy of the spirit ; and if she remains mysterious, hers is a smiling mystery, like that of Leonardo da Vinci's madonnas. Man does not wish to be woman, but he dreams of enfolding within him all that exists, including therefore this woman, whom he is not ; in his worship of his mother he endeavours to take possession of her strange wealth. To recognize that he is son of his mother is to recognize his mother in himself, it is to become one with femininity in so far as femininity is connection with the earth, with life, and with the past.

In Vittorini's *In Sicily,* what the hero seeks in visiting his mother is his native land, its fragrance and its fruits, his childhood, the memory of his ancestors, the traditions, the roots from which his personal life has cut him off. It is this very 'enrooting' that in man exalts his pride in his transcendence ; it pleases him to observe with admiration how he tears himself from his mother's arms to go forth for adventure, the future, war. This departure would be less moving if there had been no one to try to detain him: it would appear like an accident, not a hard-won victory. And, too, he is pleased to know that those arms remain ready to welcome him back. After the strain of battle the hero likes to enjoy again the repose of immanence with his mother: she is refuge, sleep ; at the caress of her hands he sinks again into nature's bosom, he lets himself be carried onward in life's vast flow as quietly as in the womb or in the grave. And if tradition would have him die calling upon his mother, it is because even death itself, under the maternal eye, is domesticated, in correspondence with birth, indissolubly linked with all life of the flesh.

The mother remains associated with death as in the ancient myth of the Parcae ; it is for her to lay out the dead, to mourn their passing. But her role is precisely to integrate death with life, with society, with the general welfare. And so the cult of 'heroic mothers' is systematically encouraged: if society can persuade mothers to yield up their sons to death, then it feels it has the right to kill them off. On account of the influence the mother has over her sons, it is advantageous for society to have her in hand: that is why the mother is surrounded with so many marks of respect, she is endowed with all the virtues, a religion is created with special reference to her, from which it is forbidden to depart at the risk of committing sacrilege and blasphemy. She is made guardian of morals; servant of man, servant of the powers that be, she will tenderly guide her children along appointed ways. The more resolutely optimistic a society is, the more docilely will it submit to this gentle authority, the more the mother will be transfigured. To glorify the mother is to accept birth, life, and death under their animal and humanly social forms at once, it is to proclaim the harmony of nature and society. Because he dreamed of achieving this synthesis, Auguste Comte made woman the divinity of the Humanity of the future. But the same considerations incite all revolutionaries against the figure of the mother ; in flouting her, they reject the *status quo* it is intended to impose upon them through the motherly guardian of laws and customs.

The respect that haloes the Mother, the prohibitions that surround her, suppress the hostile disgust that is mingled spontaneously with the carnal tenderness she inspires. A certain masked horror of maternity survives, however. It is of especial interest to note that since the Middle Ages a secondary myth has been in existence, permitting free expression of this repugnance: it is the myth of the Mother-in-Law. From fable to vaudeville, man flouts maternity in general through his wife's mother, whom no taboo protects. He loathes the thought that the woman he loves should have been engendered: his mother-in-law is the visible image of the decrepitude to which she has doomed her daughter in bringing her forth. Her fat and her wrinkles give notice of the fat and wrinkles coming to the young bride whose future is thus mournfully prefigured; at her mother's side she seems no longer the wished-for prey, the cherished companion, because her individual and separate existence merges into universal life. Her individuality is derisively contested by generality, the

autonomy of her spirit by her being rooted in the past and in the flesh: it is this derision to which man gives objective existence in a grotesque personage. But if his laugh is full of rancour, it is because he knows well enough that his wife's lot is the lot of all: it is his. In every country tales and legends have similarly incarnated the cruel aspect of maternity in the stepmother. It is her stepmother who would have Snow White perish. In the figure of the wicked stepmother—like Mme Fichini, whipping Sophie through Mme de Ségur's books—survives the antique Kali with her necklace of severed heads.

Yet close behind the sainted Mother presses the throng of female white magicians who offer for man's use the juices of herbs and the radiations of the stars: grandmothers, old women with kindly eyes, good-hearted servants, Sisters of Mercy, nurses with wonderfully gentle hands, the loved one of Verlaine's dream:

> Sweet, pensive and dark and surprised at nothing,
> And who at times will kiss you on the forehead like a child.

To them is ascribed the pure mystery of gnarled vine and fresh water; they dress and heal wounds; their wisdom is the silent wisdom of life, they understand without words. In their presence man forgets his pride; he knows the sweetness of yielding and becoming once more a child, for with such women he need not struggle for prestige: he could not begrudge nature her non-human powers; and in their devotedness the wise initiates who take care of him recognize the fact that they are his servants; he submits to their kindly power because he knows that in this submission he remains their master. Sisters, childhood friends, pure young girls, all the mothers of the future belong to this beneficent band. And his wife herself, her erotic magic once dissipated, is regarded by many men less as a sweetheart than as the mother of their children. When once the mother has been sanctified and enslaved, one need not be affrighted to find her again in the companion, who is also sanctified and submissive. To redeem the mother is to redeem the flesh, and hence carnal union and the wife.

Deprived of her magic weapons by the marriage rites and subordinated economically and socially to her husband, the 'good wife' is man's most precious treasure. She belongs to him so profoundly that she partakes of the same essence as he; she has his name, his gods, and he is responsible for her.

He calls her his 'better half'. He takes pride in his wife as he does in his house, his lands, his flocks, his wealth, and sometimes even more; through her he displays his power before the world: she is his measure and his earthly portion. In the Oriental view, a woman should be fat: people can see that she is well nourished and she does honour to her lord and master.[1] A Moslem is better thought of the more wives he has and the more flourishing their appearance. In bourgeois society one of the roles assigned to woman is *to make a good show*; her beauty, charm, intelligence, elegance are the outward and visible signs of her husband's wealth, as is the custom-built body of his car. If he is rich he covers her with fur and jewels; if not so rich, he will boast of her morality and her housekeeping. The most destitute, if he has obtained a woman to serve him, believes he owns something in the world: the hero of *The Taming of the Shrew* calls all his neighbours in to see how authoritatively he can subdue his wife. Every man in a way recalls King Candaules: he exhibits his wife because he believes that in this way he is advertising his own merits.

But woman flatters not only man's social vanity; she is the source of a more intimate pride. He is delighted with his domination over her; upon those realistic symbols of the ploughshare opening the furrow are superimposed—when woman is a person—more spiritual symbols: the husband 'forms' his wife not erotically alone, but also morally and intellectually; he educates her, marks her, sets his imprint upon her. One of the daydreams in which man takes delight is that of imbuing things with his will—modelling their form, penetrating their substance. And woman is *par excellence* the 'clay in his hands', which can be passively worked and shaped; in yielding she resists, thus allowing masculine activity to go on indefinitely. A too plastic substance is soon finished and done with, because it is easy to work; but what is precious in woman is that something in her somehow eludes every embrace; thus man is master of a reality all the more worthy of being mastered in that it is constantly escaping control.

Woman awakens in man an unknown being whom he recognizes with pride as himself; in the blameless orgies of marriage he discovers the splendours of his own animal nature: he is the Male. And in like manner woman is female, but this word now acquires the most complimentary implications: the female animal, brooding over her young, giving

[1] See not on p. 183.

them suck, licking them, defending them, saving them at the risk of her life—this female is an example for mankind ; man with emotion demands this patience, this devotion from his companion ; it is Nature again, but penetrated with all the virtues that are useful to society, to the family, to the head of the family, which he understands how to lock up in the home. One of the wishes common to man and child is to unveil the secret hidden inside of things ; from this point of view matter is deceptive. When a doll is ripped open, there is its belly outside, it has no more inwardness. The inner nature of living things is more impenetrable ; the feminine belly is the symbol of immanence, of depth ; it gives up its secrets in part, as when pleasure is revealed in the expression of a woman's face ; but it also holds them back ; man inveigles the obscure palpitations of life into his house without this mystery being destroyed by possession. Woman transposes the functions of the female animal into the world of humanity ; she maintains life, reigning over the realms of immanence ; she brings the warmth and the intimacy of the womb into the home ; she it is who cares for and animates the dwelling where the past is preserved, the future prefigured ; she brings forth the next generation and she feeds the children already born. Thanks to her, the existence that man disperses through the outside world in work and activity is concentrated again within her immanence: when he comes home in the evening, he is once more at anchor on the earth ; through his wife the continuity of his days is assured ; whatever may be the hazards he confronts in the outer world, she guarantees the recurrence of meals, of sleep ; she restores whatever has been destroyed or worn out by activity, preparing food for the tired worker, caring for him when he is sick, mending, washing. And into the conjugal universe that she sets up and keeps going, she brings the whole vast world: she lights fires, puts flowers about the house, domesticates the emanations of sun, water, and earth. A bourgeois writer cited by Bebel seriously sums up this ideal as follows: 'Man longs not only for one whose heart beats for him alone, but whose hand laves his brow, who radiates peace, order, tranquillity, and who exercises a quiet control over him and over the things he finds when he gets home each day ; he wants someone to exhale over everything the indefinable perfume of woman, the vivifying warmth of life at home.'

It can be seen how since the birth of Christianity the figure of woman has become spiritualized. The beauty, the warmth,

the intimacy that man wishes to enjoy through woman, are no longer tangible qualities ; instead of summing up the immediate and enjoyable quality of things, she becomes their soul ; deeper than the carnal mystery, a secret and pure presence in her heart reflects the truth of the world. She is the soul of the house, of the family, of the home. And she is the soul of such larger groups, also, as the city, state, and nation. Jung remarks that cities have always been likened to the Mother, because they contain the citizens in their bosom: hence Cybele is represented as crowned with towers. And likewise one speaks of the 'mother country' ; but it is not only the nourishing soil, it is a more subtle reality that finds its symbol in woman. In the Old Testament and in the Apocalypse, Jerusalem and Babylon are not merely mothers: they are also wives. There are virgin cities, and whorish cities like Babel and Tyre. And so France has been called the 'eldest daughter of the Church' ; France and Italy are Latin sisters. Woman's femininity and not her function is brought out in the statues that represent France, Rome, and Germania and in those of the Place de la Concorde which personify Strasbourg and Lyon. This likening of places to women is not purely symbolical: it is emotionally felt by many men. Very often the traveller seeks in woman the key to the countries he visits: when he embraces an Italian or Spanish woman, it seems to him that he possesses the fragrant essence of Italy or Spain. 'When I arrive in a new city, I always begin by visiting a brothel,' a journalist remarked. If a cinnamon chocolate can disclose all Spain for Gide, so much the more will the kisses of exotic lips give over to the lover a whole country with its flora and its fauna, its traditions and its culture. Woman does not sum up political institutions, or economic resources ; but she incarnates at once their material core and their mystic mana. From Lamartine's *Graziella* to the novels of Pierre Loti and the tales of Morand, we see the stranger endeavouring to grasp the soul of a region through women. Mignon, Sylvia, Mireille, Colomba, Carmen reveal the innermost reality of Italy, Valais, Provence, Corsica, Andalusia. That Goethe gained the love of the Alsatian Frederika seemed to the Germans a symbol of the annexation of Alsace by Germany ; on the other hand, when Colette Baudoche refused to marry a German, in Barrès's eyes it was Alsace repulsing Germany. He symbolizes Aigues-Mortes and a whole subtle and sensitive civilization in the small figure of Bernice ; she represents also the sensitiveness of the writer himself. For in

her who is the soul of nature, of cities, of the universe, man also perceives his mysterious double ; man's soul is Psyche, a woman. Psyche has feminine traits in Poe's *Ulalume*:

> Here once, through an alley Titanic,
> Of cypress, I roamed with my Soul—
> Of cypress, with Psyche, my Soul. . . .
> Thus I pacified Psyche and kissed her . . .
> And I said: 'What is written, sweet sister,
> On the door of this legended tomb?' . . .

And Mallarmé, in dialogue at the theatre with 'a soul or rather our idea of it' (to wit, the divinity in the human spirit), calls the soul 'a most exquisite abnormal lady' [*sic*]. The Christian world has substituted less carnal presences for nymphs and fairies ; but homes, landscapes, cities, and individuals themselves are still haunted by an impalpable femininity.

This truth, enshrouded in the night of things, also shines forth in the sky ; perfectly immanent, the Soul is at the same time transcendence, the Idea. Not only are cities and nations clothed in feminine attributes, but also abstract entities, such as institutions: the Church, the Synagogue, the Republic, Humanity are women ; so also are Peace, War, Liberty, the Revolution, Victory. Man feminizes the ideal he sets up before him as the essential Other, because woman is the material representation of alterity ; that is why almost all allegories, in language as in pictorial representation, are women.[1] Woman is Soul and Idea, but she also is a mediatrix between them: she is the divine Grace, leading the Christian towards God, she is Beatrice guiding Dante in the beyond, Laura summoning Petrarch to the lofty summits of poety. In all the doctrines that unify Nature and Spirit she appears as Harmony, Reason, Truth. The gnostic sects made Wisdom a woman, Sophia, crediting her with the redemption of the world and even its creation. Here we see woman no longer as flesh, but as glorified substance ; she is no longer to be possessed, but venerated in her intact splendour ; the pale dead of Poe are fluid as water, wind, memory ; for chivalric love, for *les précieux*, and through all the tradition of romance, woman is no longer

[1] Philology is rather mystifying on this question; all linguists agree in recognizing that the assignment of genders to concrete words is purely accidental. In French, however, most abstract entities are feminine; e.g. *beauté, loyauté*, etc., and in German most imported, foreign, *other* words are feminine; e.g. *die Bar*.

an animal creature but is rather an ethereal being, a breath, a glow. Thus is the opacity of the female Night transformed into transparency, and wickedness to purity.[1]

The downward influence of woman is reversed; she summons man no longer earthwards but towards the sky. Goethe proclaims it at the end of *Faust*:

> The Eternal Feminine
> Beckons us upward.

The Virgin Mary being the most fully realized and generally venerated image of woman regenerated and consecrated to the Good, it is of interest to see how she is represented in literature and pictures. These are extracts from the litanies addressed to her in the Middle Ages by the fervent Christian:

> ... Most high Virgin, thou art the fertile Dew, the Fountain of Joy, the Channel of pity, the Well of living waters which cool our fervours.
>
> Thou art the Breast from which God gives orphans to suck. ...
>
> Thou art the Marrow, the tiny Bit, the Kernel of all good things,
>
> Thou art the guileless Woman whose love never changes. ...
>
> Thou art the subtle Physician whose like is not to be found in Salerno or Montpellier. ...
>
> Thou art the Lady with healing hands ... Thou makest the paralysed to walk, thou reformest the base, thou revivest the dead.

We find again in these invocations most of the feminine traits we have noted. The Virgin is fecundity, dew, wellspring

[1] The idea is in these passages of Novalis:

'Nocturnal ecstasy, celestial slumber, you descend upon me; the landscape mounts up gently, above the landscape floats my spirit, released, regenerated. The words become a cloud through which I glimpse the transfigured lineaments of my well-beloved.'

'Are we then pleasing to you, also, sombre Night? ... A precious balm flows from your hands, a ray falls from your bright sheaf ... We are seized with an emotion, obscure and inexpressible: I see a serious face, joyfully startled, bending over me gently and in quiet reflection, and I discern beneath the entwining ringlets the Mother's beloved youthfulness ... More heavenly than the shining stars appear the eyes of infinity which the Night has opened within us.'

of life; many statuettes show her at the well, the spring, the fountain; the phrase 'Fountain of life' is one of the most widely used; she is not creative, but she fructifies, she makes what was hidden in the earth spring forth into the light of day. She is the deep reality hidden under the appearance of things: the Kernel, the Marrow. Through her is desire appeased: she is what is given to man for his satisfaction. She heals and strengthens; she is intermediary between man and life; life comes from God, therefore she is intermediary between humanity and God. Tertullian called her 'the devil's doorway'; but, transfigured, she is the doorway to heaven. In paintings we see her opening a door or a window upon paradise, or placing a ladder between the earth and the firmament. She is shown more directly as advocate, pleading for man before her Son, and on the Day of Judgment, her bosom bared, making supplication to Christ in the name of her glorious maternity. She protects children, and her pitying love follows men on the sea, the field of battle, through every hazard. She sways divine Justice, smilingly weighting on the side of charity the scales that tell the worth of souls.

This role of pity and tenderness is one of the most important of all those which have been assigned to woman. Even when fully integrated in a society, woman subtly extends its frontiers because she has the insidious generosity of Life. To be sure, this gap between the planned works of man and the contingence of nature seems disquieting in some cases; but it becomes beneficial when woman, too docile to threaten man's works, limits herself to enriching them and softening their too rugged lines. Male gods represent Destiny; in goddesses one finds arbitrary benevolence, capricious favour. The Christian God is full of the rigours of Justice, the Virgin is full of the gentleness of charity. Here on earth men are defenders of the law, of reason, of necessity; woman is aware of the original contingency of man himself and of this necessity in which he believes; hence come both the mysterious irony that flits across her lips and her pliant generosity. She heals the wounds of the males, she nurses the newborn, and she lays out the dead; she knows everything about man that attacks his pride and humiliates his self-will. While she inclines before him and humbles the flesh to the spirit, she stays on the fleshly frontiers of the spirit, softening, as I have said, the hard angles of man's constructions and bestowing upon them unforeseen luxury and grace. Woman's power over men comes from the

fact that she gently recalls them to a modest realization of their true condition; it is the secret of her disillusioned, sorrowful, ironical, and loving wisdom. In woman even frivolity, capriciousness, and ignorance are charming virtues because they flourish this side of and beyond the world where man chooses to live but where he does not like to feel himself confined. In contrast to set meanings and tools made for useful purposes, she upholds the mystery of intact things; she wafts the breath of poetry through city streets, over cultivated fields. Poetry is supposed to catch what exists beyond the prose of every day; and woman is an eminently poetic reality since man projects into her all that he does not resolve to be. She incarnates the Dream, which is for man most intimate and most strange: what he does not wish and does not do, towards which he aspires and which cannot be attained; the mysterious Other who is deep immanence and far-off transcendence will lend the dream her traits. Thus it is that Aurélia visits Nerval in a dream and gives him the whole world in the image of the dream: 'She began to enlarge in a bright ray of light in such a way that little by little the garden took on her shape, and the flower beds and the trees became the roses and the festoons of her vestments; while her face and her arms impressed their shape upon the reddened clouds in the sky. I lost sight of her as she was transfigured, for she seemed to vanish as she took on grandeur. "Oh, flee not from me!" I cried; "for nature dies with you." '

Woman being the very substance of man's poetic work, it is understandable that she should appear as his inspiration: the Muses are women. A Muse mediates between the creator and the natural springs whence he must draw. Woman's spirit is profoundly sunk in nature, and it is through her that man will sound the depths of silence and of the fecund night. A Muse creates nothing by herself; she is a calm, wise Sibyl, putting herself with docility at the service of a master. Even in concrete and practical realms her counsel will be useful. Man would fain attain his ends without the often embarrassing aid of other men; but he fancies that woman speaks from a sense of different values, with an instinctive wisdom of her own, in close accord with the real. Man seeks her 'intuitions' as he might interrogate the stars. Such 'intuition' is injected even into business and politics: Aspasia and Mme de Maintenon still have successful careers today.[1]

[1] But the truth is, of course, that women display intellectual qualities perfectly identical with those of men.

Another function that man readily entrusts to woman is the weighing of values ; she is a privileged judge. Man dreams of an Other not only to possess her but also to be ratified by her ; to be ratified by other men, his peers, demands a constant tension ; hence he wishes consideration from outside to confer an absolute value upon his life, his enterprises, and himself. The consideration of God is hidden, alien, disquieting ; even in times of faith only a few mystics longed for it. This divine role has most often devolved upon woman. Being the Other, she remains exterior to man's world and can view it objectively ; and being close to man and dominated by him, she does not establish values foreign to his nature. She it is who in each particular case will report the presence or absence of courage, strength, beauty, while giving outside confirmation of their universal value. Men are too much involved in their co-operative and competitive relations to act as a public for one another. Woman is outside the fray: her whole situation destines her to play this role of concerned spectator. The knight jousts for his lady in the tourney ; poets seek the approbation of women. Setting out to conquer Paris, Rastignac plans first to *have* women, not so much to possess them physically as to enjoy the reputation that only they can give a man. Balzac projected in such young heroes the story of his own youth: he began to educate and shape himself in the company of older mistresses ; and woman plays this educational role not only in his *Lys dans la vallée*. It is assigned to her in Flaubert's *Education sentimentale*, in Stendhal's novels, and in many other stories of apprenticeship. We have noted before that woman is *physis* and *anti-physis*: that is, she incarnates Nature no more than she does Society ; in her is summed up the civilization and culture of an epoch, as we see in the poems of chivalry, in the *Decameron*, in *Astrée*. She launches new fashions, presides in the salons, influences and reflects opinion. Renown and glory are women ; and Mallarmé said: 'The crowd is a woman.' In the company of women the young man is initiated into 'society', and into that complex reality called 'life'. Woman is a special prize which the hero, the adventurer, and the rugged individualist are destined to win. In antiquity we see Perseus delivering Andromeda, Orpheus seeking Eurydice in the underworld, and Troy fighting to protect fair Helen. The novels of chivalry are concerned chiefly with such prowess as the deliverance of captive princesses. What would Prince Charming have for occupation if he had not to awaken the Sleeping Beauty? The myth of

the king marrying a shepherdess gratifies man as much as woman. The rich man needs to give or his useless wealth remains an abstraction: he must have someone at hand to give to. The Cinderella myth flourishes especially in prosperous countries like America. How should the men there spend their surplus money if not upon a woman? Orson Welles, among others, has embodied in *Citizen Kane* that imperial and false generosity: it is to glorify his own power that Kane chooses to shower his gifts upon an obscure singer and to impose her upon the public as a great queen of song. When the hero of another film, *The Razor's Edge*, returns from India equipped with absolute wisdom, the only thing he finds to do with it is to redeem a prostitute.

It is clear that in dreaming of himself as donor, liberator, redeemer, man still desires the subjection of woman; for in order to awaken the Sleeping Beauty, she must have been put to sleep; ogres and dragons must be if there are to be captive princesses. The more man acquires a taste for difficult enterprises, however, the more it will please him to give woman independence. To conquer is still more fascinating than to give gifts or to release.

Thus the ideal of the average Western man is a woman who freely accepts his domination, who does not accept his ideas without discussion, but who yields to his arguments, who resists him intelligently and ends by being convinced. The greater his pride, the more dangerous he likes his adventures to be: it is much more splendid to conquer Penthesilea than it is to marry a yielding Cinderella. 'The warrior loves danger and sport,' said Nietzsche; 'that is why he loves woman, the most dangerous sport of all.' The man who likes danger and sport is not displeased to see woman turn into an amazon if he retains the hope of subjugating her. What he requires in his heart of hearts is that this struggle remain a game for him, while for woman it involves her very destiny. Man's true victory, whether he is liberator or conquerer, lies just in this: that woman freely recognizes him as her destiny.

Thus the expression 'to have a woman' hides a double significance: her functions as object and as arbiter are not distinguished. From the moment when woman is regarded as a person, she cannot be conquered accept with her consent; she must be won. It is the Sleeping Beauty's smile that crowns the efforts of Prince Charming; the captive princess's tears of joy and gratitude make the knight's prowess valid. On the other hand, her measuring gaze does not have the aloof

severity of a masculine gaze, it is susceptible to charm. Thus heroism and poetry are modes of seduction ; but in letting herself be charmed, woman glorifies heroism and poetry. In the view of the individualist, she holds a prerogative yet more essential: she seems to him to be not the measure of values recognized by all, but the revelation of his special merits and of his very being. A man is judged by his fellows according to what he does both objectively and with regard to generally accepted standards. But some of his qualities, and among others his vital qualities, can interest woman only ; he is virile, charming, seductive, tender, cruel only in reference to her. If he sets a high value on these more secret virtues, he has an absolute need of her ; through her he will experience the miracle of seeming to himself to be another, another who is also his profoundest ego. There is a passage from Malraux which expresses admirably what the individualist expects from his loved woman. Kyo is questioning himself: '"We hear the voices of others with our ears, our own voices with our throats." Yes. One hears his own life, also, with his throat—and those of others? . . . In the eyes of others, I am what I have done . . . But to May alone he was not what he had done ; and to him alone she was something quite other than her biography. The embrace in which love unites two beings against solitude did not provide its relief for man ; it was for the madman, for the incomparable monster, dearest of all things, that everyone is to himself and that he cherishes in his heart. Since the death of his mother, May was the only person for whom he was not Kyo Gisors but a most intimate companion . . . Men are not my fellows, they are persons who look upon me and judge me ; my fellows are those who love me and do not look upon me, who love me regardless of everything, degradation, baseness, treason, who love me and not what I have done or shall do, who will love me as long as I shall love myself, even to the point of suicide.'[1]

What makes the attitude of Kyo human and moving is that it implies reciprocity and that he asks May to love him as he is, not to send back a fawning reflection. With many men this demand is degraded: instead of an exact revelation, they seek to find in two living eyes their image haloed with admiration and gratitude, deified. Woman has often been compared to water because, among other reasons, she is the mirror in which the male, Narcissus-like, contemplates himself: he bends over her in good or bad faith. But in any case what

[1] *La Condition humaine* (*Man's Fate*).

he really asks of her is to be, outside of him, all that which he cannot grasp inside himself, because the inwardness of the existent is only nothingness and because he must project himself into an object in order to reach himself. Woman is the supreme recompense for him since, under a shape foreign to him which he can possess in her flesh, she is his own apotheosis. He embraces this 'incomparable monster', himself, when he presses in his arms the being who sums up the World for him and upon whom he has imposed his values and his laws. Then, in uniting with this other whom he has made his own, he hopes to reach himself. Treasure, prey, sport and danger, nurse, guide, judge, mediatrix, mirror, woman is the Other in whom the subject transcends himself without being limited, who opposes him without denying him; she is the Other who lets herself be taken without ceasing to be the Other, and therein she is so necessary to man's happiness and to his triumph that it can be said that if she did not exist, men would have invented her.

They did invent her.[1] But she exists also apart from their inventiveness. And hence she is not only the incarnation of their dream, but also its frustration. There is no figurative image of woman which does not call up at once its opposite: she is Life and Death, Nature and Artifice, Daylight and Night. Under whatever aspect we consider her, we always find the same shifting back and forth, for the non-essential returns necessarily to the essential. In the figures of the Virgin Mary and Beatrice, Eve and Circe still exist.

'Through woman,' writes Kierkegaard in *In Vino Veritas*, 'ideality enters into life, and what would man be without her? Many a man has become a genius thanks to some young girl ... but none has ever become a genius thanks to the young girl who gave him her hand in marriage....'

'Woman makes a man productive in ideality through a negative relation ... Negative relations with woman can make us infinite ... positive relations with woman make a man finite for the most part.' Which is to say that woman is necessary in so far as she remains an Idea into which man projects his own transcendence; but that she is inauspicious as an objective reality, existing in and for herself. Kierkegaard holds that by refusing to marry his fiancée he established the only valid relation to woman. And he is right in a sense:

[1] 'Man created woman, and with what? With a rib of his god, of his ideal,' says NIETZSCHE in *The Twilight of the Idols*.

namely, that the myth of woman set up as the infinite Other entails also its opposite.

Because she is a false Infinite, an Ideal without truth, she stands exposed as finiteness and mediocrity and, on the same ground, as falsehood. In Laforgue she appears in this light; throughout his works he gives voice to his rancour against a mystification for which he blamed man as much as woman. Ophelia, Salome, are in fact only *petites femmes*. Hamlet seems to think: 'Thus would Ophelia have loved me, as her boon and because I was socially and morally superior to what her girlish friends had. And those small, common remarks that she would make, at lamp-lighting time, on ease and comfort!' Woman makes man dream; yet she thinks of comfort, of stew for supper; one speaks to her of her soul when she is only a body. And while her lover fondly believes he is pursuing the Ideal, he is actually the plaything of nature, who employs all this mystification for the ends of reproduction. Woman in truth represents the everyday aspects of life; she is silliness, prudence, shabbiness, boredom.

Man has succeeded in enslaving woman; but in the same degree he has deprived her of what made her possession desirable. With woman integrated in the family and in society, her magic is dissipated rather than transformed; reduced to the condition of servant, she is no longer that unconquered prey incarnating all the treasures of nature. Since the rise of chivalric love it is a commonplace that marriage kills love. Scorned too much, respected too much, too much an everyday matter, the wife ceases to have erotic attraction. The marriage rites were originally intended to protect man against woman; she becomes his property. But all that we possess possesses us in turn, and marriage is a form of servitude for man also. He is taken in the snare set by nature: because he desired a fresh young girl, he has to support a heavy matron or a desiccated hag for life. The dainty jewel intended to decorate his existence becomes a hateful burden: Xantippe has always been a type of woman most horrifying to man; in ancient Greece and in the Middle Ages she was, as we have seen, the theme of many lamentations. But even when the woman is young there is a hoax in marriage, since, while being supposed to socialize eroticism, it succeeds only in killing it.

The fact is that eroticism implies a claim of the instant against time, of the individual against the group; it affirms separation against communication; it is rebellion against all

regulation ; it contains a principle hostile to society. Customs are never bent quite to the rigour of institutions and laws ; against these love has ever hurled defiance. In its sensual form love in Greece and Rome was turned towards young men or courtesans ; chivalric love, at once carnal and platonic, was always destined for another's wife. *Tristan* is the epic of adultery. The period which, about 1900, created anew the myth of woman is that in which adultery became the theme of all literature. Certain writers, like Henry Bernstein, in a supreme effort to defend bourgeois institutions, struggled to reintegrate eroticism and love into marriage ; but there was more truth in Porto-Riche's *Amoureuse,* in which the incompatibility of these two orders of values was shown. Adultery can disappear only with marriage itself. For the aim of marriage is in a way to immunize man against *his own* wife: but other women keep—for him—their heady attraction ; and to them he will turn. Women make themselves a party to this. For they rebel against an order of things which undertakes to deprive them of all their weapons. In order to separate woman from Nature, to subject her to man through ceremonies and contracts, she has been elevated to the dignity of being a human person, she has been given liberty. But liberty is precisely that which escapes all subjugation ; and if it be granted to a being originally possessed of maleficent powers, she becomes dangerous. She becomes the more so in that man stops at half-measures ; he accepts woman in the masculine world only in making a servant of her and frustrating her transcendence ; the liberty given to her can have none but a negative use ; she chooses to reject this liberty. Woman has been free only in becoming a captive ; she renounces this human privilege in order to regain her power as a natural object. By day she perfidiously plays her role of docile servant, but at night she changes into cat, or hind ; she slips again into her siren's skin or, riding on a broomstick, she takes off for the devil's dances. Sometimes, to be sure, she works her nocturnal magic upon her own husband ; but it is wiser to hide her metamorphoses from her master ; she chooses strangers as prey ; they have no rights over her, and for them she is still vegetation, well-spring, star, sorceress. She is thus fated for infidelity: it is the sole concrete form her liberty can assume. She is unfaithful beyond even her desires, thoughts, awareness ; by virtue of the fact that she is regarded as an object, she is offered to any subjectivity who chooses to take possession of her. Locked away in a harem, hidden behind veils, it is still by no means

sure that she will not arouse desire in someone ; and to inspire desire in a stranger is already to fail her husband and society. But, further, she is often a willing accomplice in the deed ; only through deceit and adultery can she prove that she is nobody's chattel and give the lie to the pretensions of the male. This is the reason why the husband's jealousy is so quick to awaken ; we see in legends how a woman can be suspected without reason, condemned on the least suspicion, like Genevieve of Brabant and Desdemona. Even before any suspicion arose, Griselda[1] was subjected to the most severe tests ; this tale would be absurd if woman was not suspect in advance ; there is no question of demonstrating her misbehaviour : it is for her to prove her innocence.

This is, indeed, why jealousy can be insatiable. We have seen that possession can never be positively realized ; even if all others are forbidden to dip therein, one never possesses the spring in which one's thirst is quenched : he who is jealous knows this full well. In essence woman is fickle, as water is fluid ; and no human power can contradict a natural truth. Throughout literature, in *The Arabian Nights* as in the *Decameron,* we see the clever ruses of woman triumph over the prudence of man. Moreover, it is not alone through individualistic will that he is the jailer: it is society that makes him —as father, brother, husband—responsible for his woman's conduct. Chastity is enforced upon her for economic and religious reasons, since each citizen ought to be authenticated as the son of his proper father.

But it is also very important to compel woman to adapt herself exactly to the role society has forced upon her. There is a double demand of man which dooms woman to duplicity : he wants the woman to be his and to remain foreign to him ; he fancies her as at once servant and enchantress. But in public he admits to only the first of these desires ; the other is a sly demand that he hides in the secrecy of his heart and flesh. It is against morality and society ; it is wicked like the Other, like rebellious Nature, like the 'bad woman'. Man does not devote himself wholly to the Good which he sets up and claims to put in force ; he retains shameful lines of communication with the Bad. But wherever the Bad dares indiscreetly to show its face uncovered, man goes to war against it. In the shadows of night man invites woman to sin. But in full daylight he disowns the sin and the fair sinner. And the women, themselves sinners in the secrecy of the bed, are only

[1] Eleventh-century type of wifely virtue.—Tr.

the more passionate in the public worship of virtue. Just as among primitive people the male sex is secular while that of the female is charged with religious and magical powers, so the misbehaviour of a man in more modern societies is only a minor folly, often regarded indulgently ; even if he disobeys the laws of the community, man continues to belong to it ; he is only an *enfant terrible,* offering no profound menace to the order of society.

If, on the other hand, woman evades the rules of society, she returns to Nature and to the demon, she looses uncontrollable and evil forces in the collective midst. Fear is always mixed with the blame attached to woman's licentious conduct. If the husband does not succeed in keeping his wife in the path of virtue, he shares in her fault ; in the eyes of society his misfortune is a blot on his honour ; there are civilizations severe enough to require him to kill the wrongdoer in order to dissociate himself from her crime. In others the complaisant husband is punished by such mockeries as parading him naked astride a jackass. And the community undertakes to chastise the guilty one in his place: she has offended not him alone, but the whole collectivity. These customs have existed in a particularly harsh form in superstitious and mystical Spain, a sensual land terrorized by the flesh. Calderón, Lorca, Valle Inclán have used this theme in many dramas. In Lorca's *House of Bernada* the village gossips would punish the seduced girl by burning her with a live coal 'in the place where she sinned'. In Valle Inclán's *Divine Words* the adulterous woman appears as a sorceress dancing with the demon ; her fault once discovered, the village assembles to tear off her clothes and then drown her. According to many traditions, the woman sinner was thus disrobed ; then she was stoned, as reported in the Bible, or she was buried alive, drowned, or burned. The meaning of these tortures is that she was in this way given back to Nature after being deprived of her social dignity ; by her sin she had let loose natural emanations of evil: the expiation was carried out in a kind of sacred orgy in which the women—demanding, striking, massacring the guilty one—released in their turn fluids of mysterious but beneficial nature, since the avengers were acting in accordance with society's rules.

This savage severity disappears as superstition diminishes and fear is dissipated. But in rural districts godless gipsies are still viewed with suspicion as homeless vagabonds. The woman who makes free use of her attractiveness—adventuress, vamp,

*femme fatale*—remains a disquieting type. The image of Circe survives in the bad woman of the Hollywood films. Women have been burnt as witches simply because they were beautiful. And in the prudish umbrage of provincial virtue before women of dissolute life, an ancient fear is kept alive.

It is in truth these very dangers that, for the adventurous man, make woman an enticing game. Disdaining marital rights and refusing the support of the laws of society, he will try to conquer her in single combat. He tries to get possession of the woman even in her resistance ; he pursues her in the very liberty through which she escapes him. In vain. One does not play a part when free: the free woman will often act as such against man. Even the Sleeping Beauty may awaken with displeasure, she may not regard her awakener as a Prince Charming at all, she may not smile. The hero's wife listens indifferently to the tale of his exploits ; the Muse of whom the poet dreams may yawn when she listens to his stanzas. The amazon can with ennui decline combat ; and she may also emerge victorious. The Roman women of the decadence, many women of today, impose their caprices or their rule upon men. Where is Cinderella?

Man wants to give, and here is woman taking for herself. It is becoming a matter of self-defence, no longer a game. From the moment when woman is free, she has no other destiny than what she freely creates for herself. The relation of the two sexes is then a relation of struggle. Now become a fellow being, woman seems as formidable as when she faced man as a part of alien Nature. In place of the myth of the laborious honey-bee or the mother hen is substituted the myth of the devouring female insect: the praying mantis, the spider. No longer is the female she who nurses the little ones, but rather she who eats the male ; the egg is no longer a storehouse of abundance, but rather a trap of inert matter in which the spermatozoon is castrated and drowned. The womb, that warm, peaceful, and safe retreat, becomes a pulp of humours, a carnivorous plant, a dark, contractile gulf, where dwells a serpent that insatiably swallows up the strength of the male. The same dialectic makes the erotic object into a wielder of black magic, the servant into a traitress, Cinderella into an ogress, and changes all women into enemies: it is the payment man makes for having in bad faith set himself up as the sole essential.

This hostile visage, however, is the definitive face of woman no more than the others. Rather, a Manichaeism is introduced

in the heart of womankind. Pythagoras likened the good principle to man and the bad principle to woman. Men have tried to overcome the bad by taking possession of woman; they have succeeded in part. But just as Christianity, by bringing in the idea of redemption and salvation, has given the word *damnation* its full meaning, just so it is in contrast to the sanctified woman that the bad woman stands out in full relief. In the course of that 'quarrel of women' which has lasted from the Middle Ages until now, certain men have wished to recognize only the blessed woman of their dreams, others only the cursed woman who belies their dreams. But in truth, if man can find *everything* in woman, it is because she has both these faces. She represents in a living, carnal way all the values and anti-values that give sense to life. Here, quite clear-cut, are Good and Evil in opposition to each other under the form of the devoted Mother and the perfidious Mistress; in the old English ballad *Lord Randal, My Son,* a young knight, poisoned by his mistress, comes home to die in his mother's arms. Richepin's *La Glu* takes up the same theme with more bathos and bad taste in general. Angelic Michaëla stands in contrast to dark Carmen. Mother, faithful fiancée, patient wife—all stand ready to bind up the wounds dealt to man's heart by 'vamps' and witches. Between these clearly fixed poles can be discerned a multitude of ambiguous figures, pitiable, hateful, sinful, victimized, coquettish, weak, angelic, devilish. Woman thus provides a great variety of behaviour and sentiment to stimulate man and enrich his life.

Man is delighted by this very complexity of woman: a wonderful servant who is capable of dazzling him—and not too expensive. Is she angel or demon? The uncertainty makes her a Sphinx. We may note here that one of the most celebrated brothels of Paris operated under this aegis, the sign of the sphinx. In the grand epoch of femininity, at the time of corsets, Paul Bourget, Henri Bataille, and the French can-can, the theme of the Sphinx was all the rage in plays, poetry, and songs: 'Who are you, whence come you, strange Sphinx?' And there is still no end to dreaming and debating on the feminine mystery. It is indeed to preserve this mystery that men have long begged women not to give up long skirts, petticoats, veils, long gloves, high-heeled shoes: everything that accentuates difference in the Other makes her more desirable, since what man wants to take possession of is the Other as such. We find Alain-Fournier chiding English women for their frank man-like way of shaking hands: what excites him is the

modest reserve of French women. Woman must remain secret, unknown, if she is to be adored as a faraway princess. There is no reason to suppose that Fournier was especially deferential to the women in his life ; but he put all the wonder of childhood, of youth, all the nostalgia for lost paradises into a woman of his own creation, a woman whose first virtue was to appear inaccessible. His picture of Yvonne de Galais is traced in white and gold.

But men cherish even woman's defects if they create mystery. 'A woman should have her caprices,' a man said authoritatively to an intelligent woman. The caprice is unpredictable, it lends woman the grace of waves in water ; falsehood adorns her with fascinating reflections ; coquetry, even perversity, gives her a heady perfume. Deceitful, elusive, unintelligible, double-dealing—thus it is that she best lends herself to the contradictory desires of man ; she is Maya in innumerable disguises. It is a commonplace to represent the Sphinx as a young woman: virginity is one of the secrets that men find most exciting—the more so as they are greater libertines ; the young girl's purity allows hope for every kind of licence, and no one knows what perversities are concealed in her innocence. Still close to animal and plant, already amenable to social forms, she is neither child nor adult ; her timid femininity inspires no fear, but a mild disquiet. We feel that she is one of the privileged exponents of feminine mystery. As 'the true young girl' disappears, however, her cult has come somewhat out of date. On the other hand, the figure of the prostitute, whom Gantillon triumphantly presented on the French stage in *Maya,* has kept much of its prestige. It is one of the most plastic feminine types, giving full scope to the grand play of vices and virtues. For the timorous puritan, the prostitute incarnates evil, shame, disease, damnation ; she inspires fear and disgust ; she belongs to no man, but yields herself to one and all and lives off such commerce. In this way she regains that formidable independence of the luxurious goddess mothers of old, and she incarnates the Femininity that masculine society has not sanctified and that remains charged with harmful powers. In the sexual act the male cannot possibly imagine that he owns her ; he has simply delivered himself over to the demon of the flesh. This is a humiliation, a defilement peculiarly resented by the Anglo-Saxons, who regard the flesh as more or less abominable. On the other hand, a man who is not afraid of the flesh will enjoy its generous and straightforward affirmation by the prostitute ; he

will sense in her the exaltation of a femininity that no morality has made wishy-washy. He will find again upon her body those magic virtues which formerly made woman sister to the stars and sea ; a Henry Miller,[1] going to bed with a prostitute, feels that he sounds the very depths of life, death, and the cosmos ; he meets God in the deep, moist shadows of a receptive vagina. Since she is a kind of pariah, living at the margin of a hypocritically moral world, we can also regard the *fille perdue* as the invalidator of all the official virtues ; her low estate relates her to the authentic saints ; for that which has been downtrodden shall be exalted. Mary Magdalene was a favourite of Christ ; sin opens heaven's gate more readily than does a hypocritical virtue. Dostoyevsky's Raskolnikov sacrifices at Sonia's feet the arrogant masculine pride that led him to crime ; he has aggravated by the murder that will to separation which is in every man : a humble prostitute, resigned, abandoned by all, can best receive the avowal of his abdication. The phrase *fille perdue* awakens disturbing echoes. For many men dream of losing themselves, but it is not so simple, one does not easily succeed in attaining Evil in positive form ; and even the demoniac is frightened by excessive crimes. Woman enables one to celebrate without great risk Black Masses where Satan is evoked without being exactly invited ; she exists at the margin of the masculine world ; acts concerned with her are truly of no consequence ; but she is a human being and it is possible therefore to carry out dark revolts through her against human law. From Musset to Georges Bataille, real, hideously fascinating debauch is that carried on in company with whores. The Marquis de Sade and Sacher-Masoch satisfy upon women the desires that haunt them ; their disciples, and most men who have 'vices' to satisfy, commonly turn to prostitutes. Of all women they are the most submissive to the male, and yet more able to escape him ; this it is that makes them take on so many varied meanings. There is no feminine type, however—virgin, mother, wife, sister, servant, loved one, fiercely virtuous one, smiling odalisque—who is not capable of summing up thus the vagrant yearnings of men.

It is for psychology—especially psychoanalysis—to discover why an individual is drawn more particularly to one or another aspect of the many-faced Myth, and why he incarnates it in some one special female. But this myth is implied in all the complexes, the obsessions, the psychoses. Many

[1] *Tropic of Cancer* (1934).—TR.

neuroses in particular have their source in a madness for the forbidden that can appear only if taboos have been previously established ; a social pressure from outside is not sufficient to explain its presence ; in fact, social prohibitions are not simply conventions ; they have—among other meanings—a developmental significance that each person experiences for himself.

By way of example, it will be of interest to examine the 'Oedipus complex', considered too often as being produced by a struggle between instinctual tendencies and social regulations, whereas it is first of all an inner conflict within the subject himself. The attachment of the infant for the mother's breast is at first an attachment to Life in its immediate form, in its generality and its immanence ; the rejection by weaning is the beginning of the rejection by abandonment, to which the individual is condemned once he emerges as a separate being from the Whole. It is from that point, and as he becomes more individualized and separate, that the term *sexual* can be applied to the inclination he retains for the maternal flesh henceforth detached from his. His sensuality is then directed through another person, it has become transcendence towards an object foreign to him. But the quicker and the more decidedly the child realizes himself as subject, the more the fleshly bond, opposing his autonomy, is going to become harassing to him. Then he shuns his mother's caresses ; and her authority, the rights she has over him, sometimes her very presence, all inspire in him a kind of shame. In particular it seems embarrassing and obscene to be aware of her as flesh, and he avoids thinking of her body ; in the horrified feeling aroused by his father or stepfather or a lover, there is not so much a pang of jealousy as a sense of scandal. To remind him thus that his mother is a carnal being is to remind him of his own birth, an event that he repudiates with all his strength or at least wants to give the dignity of a grand cosmic phenomenon. He feels that his mother should sum up Nature, which invests all individuals without belonging to any ; he hates to have her become some man's prey, not, as is often maintained, because he wants to have her himself, but because he wishes her to be beyond all possession: she should not have the paltry dimensions of wife or mistress. When his sexuality becomes manly at adolescence, however, it may well happen that his mother's body arouses him erotically ; but this is because she reminds him of femininity in general ; and very often the desire aroused by the sight of a thigh or a breast disappears at the young man's realization that this flesh is his

mother's flesh. There are numerous cases of perversion, since, adolescence being a disordered period, it is a time of perversion, when disgust leads to sacrilege, and temptation is born of the forbidden. But it is not to be believed that at first the son quite simply wishes to have intercourse with his mother and that exterior prohibitions interfere and tyrannically prevent him; on the contrary, desire is born just because of that prohibition which is set up in the heart of the individual himself. This prohibition is the most normal general reaction. But here again the interdiction does not come from a social regulation repressing instinctive desires. Rather, respect is the sublimation of an original disgust; the young man refuses to regard his mother as carnal; he transfigures her and assimilates her to one of the pure images of sacred womanhood which society holds up for his admiration. Thus he helps to strengthen the ideal figure of the Mother who will be concerned with the welfare of the next generation. But this figure has so much force only because it is called forth by an inner, individual dialectic. And since every woman is endowed with the general essence of Woman, therefore of the Mother, it is certain that the attitude held towards the Mother will have repercussions in a man's relations with wife and mistresses—but less simply than is often supposed. The adolescent who has felt definite, sensual sex desire for his mother may well have been simply desiring woman in general. In this case the ardour of his temperament will be appeased with no matter what woman, for he is no victim of incestuous nostalgia.[1] Inversely, a young man who has felt a tender but platonic reverence for his mother may wish in every instance for woman to share in the maternal purity.

The importance of sexuality, and therefore ordinarily of woman, in both normal and abnormal behaviour is surely well known. It may happen that other objects are feminized. Since woman is indeed in large part man's invention, he can invent her in the male body: in pederasty some pretence of sexual distinction is kept up. But as a rule it is unquestionably in feminine persons that Woman is sought for. It is through her, through what is in her of the best and the worst, that man, as a young apprentice, learns of felicity and suffering, of vice, virtue, lust, renunciation, devotion, and tyranny—that as an apprentice he learns to know himself. Woman is sport and adventure, but also a test. She is the triumph of victory and the more bitter triumph of frustration survived;

[1] Stendhal is a striking example.

she is the vertigo of ruin, the fascination of damnation, of death. There is a whole world of significance which exists only through woman; she is the substance of men's acts and sentiments, the incarnation of all the values that call out their free activity. It is understandable that, were he condemned to the most cruel disappointments, man would not be willing to relinquish a dream within which all his dreams are enfolded.

This, then, is the reason why woman has a double and deceptive visage: she is all that man desires and all that he does not attain. She is the good mediatrix between propitious Nature and man; and she is the temptation of unconquered Nature, counter to all goodness. She incarnates all moral values, from good to evil, and their opposites; she is the substance of action and whatever is an obstacle to it, she is man's grasp on the world and his frustration; as such she is the source and origin of all man's reflection on his existence and of whatever expression he is able to give to it; and yet she works to divert him from himself, to make him sink down in silence and in death. She is servant and companion, but he expects her also to be his audience and critic and to confirm him in his sense of being; but she opposes him with her indifference, even with her mockery and laughter. He projects upon her what he desires and what he fears, what he loves and what he hates. And if it is so difficult to say anything specific about her, that is because man seeks the whole of himself in her and because she is All. She is All, that is, on the plane of the inessential; she is all the Other. And, as the other, she is other than herself, other than what is expected of her. Being all, she is never quite *this* which she should be; she is everlasting deception, the very deception of that existence which is never successfully attained nor fully reconciled with the totality of existents.

CHAPTER II

# THE MYTH OF WOMAN IN FIVE AUTHORS

To confirm this analysis of the feminine myth as it appears in a general view, we shall now consider the special and variously combined forms that it has assumed in certain writers. The attitudes towards women of Montherlant, D. H. Lawrence, Claudel, Breton and Stendhal, for example, have seemed to me to be typical.

## I

## MONTHERLANT OR THE BREAD OF DISGUST

Montherlant belongs to the long tradition of males who have adopted as their own the proud Manichaeism of Pythagoras. Following Nietzsche, he holds that only epochs marked by weakness have exalted the Eternal Feminine and that the hero should rise in revolt against the Magna Mater. A specialist in heroism, he undertakes to dethrone her. Woman—she is night, disorder, immanence. 'These convulsive shadows are nothing more than the feminine in its pure state,' he cries apropos of Mme Tolstoy in *Sur les femmes*. According to him, it is the stupidity and the baseness of the men of today that have lent an air of positive worth to feminine deficiencies: we hear about women's instinct, their intuition, their divination, when it is right to denounce their lack of logic, their obstinate ignorance, their inability to grasp reality. They are in fact neither observers nor psychologists; they can neither see things nor understand living beings; their mystery is a snare and a delusion, their unfathomable treasures have the depth of nothingness; they have nothing to give to man and can only do him injury. For Montherlant it is first of all the mother who is the great enemy; in a youthful publication, *L'Exil*, he shows us a mother who prevents her son from getting engaged; in *Les Olympiques* the adolescent who would give himself to sport is 'barred' through his mother's timid egotism; in *Les Célibataires* as in *Les Jeunes Filles* the

mother is given hateful characteristics. Her crime is to wish to keep her son for ever enclosed within the darkness of her body; she mutilates him so she can keep him all to herself and thus fill the sterile void in her being; she is the most deplorable of teachers; she clips the child's wings, she holds him back, far from the summits to which he aspires; she makes him stupid and degrades him.

These complaints are not without foundation. But through the explicit reproaches Montherlant heaps upon the woman mother it is clearly seen that what he detests, in her, is the fact of his own birth. He believes he is God, he wants to be God; and this because he is male, because he is a 'superior man', because he is Montherlant. A god is no engendered being; his body, if he has one, is a will cast in firm and disciplined muscles, not a mass of flesh vulgarly subject to life and death; he holds the mother responsible for this perishable flesh, contingent, vulnerable, and disowned by himself. 'The only place on his body where Achilles was vulnerable was where his mother had held him,' says Montherlant in *Sur les femmes*. He has never been willing to accept the conditions implied in being human; what he calls his pride is from first to last a terrified flight from the risks that confront a free being involved with the world in a body of flesh and blood; he claims to assert his liberty while rejecting the involvement; without ties, rootless, he fancies himself a supremely self-sufficient subjective being; but the memory of his carnal origin upsets this dream, and he takes refuge in a procedure that is habitual with him: instead of rising above his origin, he repudiates it.

For Montherlant the mistress is as ill-omened as the mother; she prevents man from reviving the god within him. Woman's lot, he declares, is life in its immediacy; she lives on sensations, she has a rage to live—and wishes to confine man in such poor estate. She does not feel the *élan* of his transcendence, she has no sense of grandeur; she loves her lover in his weakness and not in his strength, in his misery and not in his joy; she wants him disarmed and unhappy to the point of wishing to convince him of his misery against all the evidence. He surpasses her and thus escapes her; but she knows how to reduce him so as to master him. For she needs him, she is not self-sufficient, she is a parasite. Through the eyes of Dominique, in *Le Songe*, Montherlant shows the strolling women of Ranelagh 'hanging on their lovers' arms like invertebrate creatures similar to large snails in disguise'.

Except for woman athletes, according to him, women are incomplete beings, doomed to slavery; soft and lacking in muscle, they have no grasp on the world; so they work hard to annex a lover or, better, a husband. Montherlant may not use the myth of the praying mantis, but he expresses its content: to love is, for woman, to devour; pretending to give, she takes. He quotes Mme Tolstoy's cry: 'I live in him, for him; I require him to do the same for me', and he depicts the dangers of such loving fury; he finds a terrible truth in the saying of Ecclesiastes: 'A man who wishes you ill is better than a woman who wishes you well.' He cites Marshal Lyautey's experience: 'A man of mine who marries is reduced to half a man.' He regards marriage as particularly ill-omened for the 'superior man'; it is ridiculously bourgeois—can you imagine saying: 'Mrs. Aeschylus,' or 'I am going to dine with the Dantes'? It weakens the prestige of a great man; and, above all, marriage destroys the magnificent solitude of the hero; he 'needs to be undisturbed in his own thoughts'.[1] I have already said that Montherlant has chosen a liberty *without object*, that is to say, he prefers an illusion of autonomy to the authentic liberty that takes action in the world; it is this detachment and freedom from responsibility that he means to defend against woman; she is heavy, she weighs one down. 'It was a harsh symbol, indeed, a man unable to walk upright because the woman he loved was on his arm.'[2] 'I was aflame, she extinguishes me. I was walking on the water, she takes my arm and I sink.'[3] How is it she has so much power, since she is only lack, poverty, negation, and since her magic is an illusion? Montherlant does not explain. He simply says with arrogance that 'the lion with good reason fears the mosquito'. But the answer is obvious: it is easy to imagine yourself sovereign when you are alone, to think yourself strong when you carefully avoid taking up any burden. Montherlant has chosen the easy way; he claims to practise the cult of arduous values, but he seeks to gain them easily. 'The wreaths we ourselves bestow upon ourselves are the only ones worth wearing,' says the King in *Pasiphaé*. A convenient principle! Montherlant overloads his brow, he drapes himself in the purple; but a glance from any stranger would suffice to reveal that his diadems are of painted paper, and that, like Hans Christian Andersen's king, he is quite naked. To walk on the

[1] *Sur les femmes.*
[2] *Les Jeunes Filles.*
[3] Ibid.

water in fancy is much less wearying than to go forward in earnest on the roads of the earth. And that is why the lion, Montherlant, avoids in terror woman, the mosquito ; he dreads the test of reality.[1]

If Montherlant had really deflated the myth of the eternal feminine, it would be in order to congratulate him on the achievement: it is by denying Woman that we can help women to assume the status of human beings. But, as we have seen, he does not smash the idol: he changes it into a monster. He, too, believes in that vague and basic essence, femininity ; he holds with Aristotle and St. Thomas that woman is to be defined negatively ; woman is woman through the lack of virility ; that is the fate to which every female individual must submit without being able to modify it. Whoever presumes to escape from it puts herself at the bottom of the scale of humanity: she fails to become a man, she gives up being a woman ; she is only a ludicrous caricature, a false show. It gives her no reality to be a body and a conscious mind: a Platonist when it suits him, Montherlant seems to hold that only the Ideas of femininity and of virility have actuality ; the individual who partakes of neither the one nor the other only appears to exist. He condemns without appeal those 'vampires of the night' who have the audacity to pose as autonomous subjects, to think, to act. And in tracing the portrait of Andrée Hacquebaut he means to prove that any woman who strives to become a personage transforms herself into a grimacing puppet. Of course Andrée is homely, ill-favoured, badly dressed, and even dirty, her hands and nails dubious: the small amount of culture attributed to her has been enough to kill her femininity completely. Costals tells us she is intelligent, but Montherlant convinces us of her stupidity on every page devoted to her. Costals asserts he is sympathetic towards her ; Montherlant makes her odious to us. By such clever double-dealing the stupidity of the feminine intelligence is proved, and it is established that an original defectiveness perverts in woman any virile qualities she may aim at.

Montherlant is quite willing to make an exception for female athletes ; by the independent exercising of the body they can win a spirit, a soul. Yet it would be easy to bring

[1] This process is considered by Adler as the classical root of the psychoses. The individual, torn between a 'will to power' and an 'inferiority complex', puts as much distance as possible between society and himself so as not to have to face the test of reality. He knows that this would undermine the pretences that he can maintain only under the cover of bad faith.

them down from these heights ; Montherlant delicately moves away from the lady winner of the thousand-metre race, to whom he offers an enthusiastic hymn, because he has no doubt of seducing her easily, and he wishes to spare her that fall. Dominique has not kept her lofty place on the summits where she was called by Alban ; she has fallen in love with him: 'She who had been all spirit and all soul now perspired, spread her odours, and, getting out of breath, gave little coughs.'[1] Revolted, Alban drove her away. One can esteem a woman who through the discipline of sport has killed her carnal nature, but it is an odious scandal that an autonomous existence should reside in woman's flesh ; feminine flesh is hateful from the moment a conscious mind inhabits it. What is fitting and proper for a woman is to be purely flesh. Montherlant approves the Oriental attitude: as an object to be enjoyed, the weaker sex has a place in the world, humble no doubt, but worthy ; it finds justification in the pleasure the male derives from it and in this pleasure alone. The ideal woman is perfectly stupid and perfectly submissive ; she is always ready to accept the male and never makes any demands upon him. Such a one is Douce, whom Alban appreciates at his convenience, 'Douce, admirably silly and always the more lusted after the more silly she was . . . useless apart from love and to be evaded then with gentle firmness.'[2] Such a one is Radidja, the little Arab, calm beast of love docilely accepting pleasure and money. Such, one can imagine, was that 'feminine beast' met with on a Spanish train: 'She had so besotted an air that I began to desire her.'[3] The author explains: 'What is irritating in women is their claim to reason ; let them exaggerate their animality and they suggest the superhuman.'

And yet Montherlant is by no means an Oriental sultan ; first of all, he is lacking in sensuality. He is far from taking his pleasure in the 'feminine beasts' without some reservation ; they are sick, unwholesome, never quite clean.[4] Costals confides to us that young boys' hair smells better and more strongly than women's ; sometimes he experiences disgust in Solange's presence, in the presence of 'that sweetish, almost sickening odour and that muscleless, nerveless body, like a white slug'. He dreams of embraces more worthy of him,

[1] *Le Songe.*

[2] *Le Songe.*

[3] *La Petite Infante de Castille.*

[4] *Les Jeunes Filles.*

between equals, where the sweetness would derive from strength overcome. The Oriental delights voluptuously in woman and thus establishes a carnal reciprocity between lovers: this is made manifest in the ardent invocations of the Song of Songs, the tales of *The Arabian Nights,* and countless Arab poems in praise of the loved one. To be sure, there are bad women ; but there are also delightful ones, and the sensual man abandons himself in their arms with confidence, without feeling humiliated. Whereas Montherlant's hero is always on the defensive: 'To take without being taken, sole acceptable formula for relations between the superior man and woman.'[1] He speaks readily of the moment of desire, which seems to him an aggressive, virile moment ; he evades that of enjoyment, for perhaps he would be in danger of discovering that he, too, perspires, pants, 'gives off his odours' ; but no, who would venture to breathe his odour, to feel his damp sweat? His disarmed flesh exists for no one, because no one is there before him: he is the lone consciousness, a pure presence, transparent and supreme ; and if for his own consciousness pleasure exists, he takes no note of it: that would be to give someone an advantage over him. He speaks with complacency of the pleasure he gives, never of that which he receives, for to receive is a form of dependence. 'What I ask of a woman is to give her pleasure' ;[2] the living heat of sex enjoyment would mean complicity: he admits of none ; he prefers the supercilious solitude of domination. He seeks cerebral not sensual satisfactions with women.

And first of all he seeks the satisfactions of a pride that calls for expression, but without running risks. Before woman 'one has the same feeling as before a horse or a bull one is about to come to grips with: the same uncertainty and the same inclination to try one's ability.'[3] To try it against other men would be foolhardy ; they would interfere in the test ; they would impose unexpected technicalities, they would render an alien verdict. But with a horse or a bull one remains one's own judge, which is much more sure. It is the same with a woman: if she be well chosen, one remains alone though confronting her: 'I do not love in equality, because I seek in woman the child.' This truism explains nothing. Why does he seek a child, not an equal? Montherlant would be more sincere if he would declare that he, Montherlant, has no equal ;

[1] *Les Jeunes Filles.*

[2] Ibid.

[3] *La Petite Infante de Castille.*

and more precisely that he does not wish to have, for his equal would frighten him. At the Olympic games he admires in sports the rigour of the competition and the relative standings determined without the possibility of cheating; but he has not himself learned the lesson. Later on, in his works and in his life, his heroes, like himself, avoid all real competition: they have to do with animals, landscapes, children, women-children—and never with equals. Though lately enthusiastic over the severe purity of sport, Montherlant accepts as mistresses only women from whom his timid pride has nothing to fear in the way of judgment; he selects such as are 'passive and vegetal', infantile, stupid, venal. He will systematically avoid attributing mature human mentality to them, and if he discovers any trace of it, he takes fright and leaves; there is no question of establishing any intersubjective relation with the woman: in man's realm she is to be only a simple animated object, never is she to be envisaged as subject; never is her point of view to be taken seriously into consideration. Montherlant's hero professes an ethics that is supposed to be arrogant and that is only convenient: he has regard only for its relations to himself. He becomes attached to woman—or rather he attaches himself to woman—not to enjoy her, but to enjoy himself: being absolutely inferior, woman's existence brings out in relief the substantial, essential, and indestructible superiority of the male—without risk.

Thus Douce's stupidity allows Alban 'to reconstruct in some measure the sensations of the antique demigod marrying a fabulous Goose'.[1] When he touches Solange, behold Costals changed into a superb lion: 'As soon as they were seated close together, he put his hand on the young girl's thigh (outside her clothes), then he held it against the centre of her body *as a lion* holds his paw spread out on the meat he has captured.'[2] This act, which, in darkened cinemas, many men perform every day without fanfare, Costals announces as being 'the primitive gesture of the Overlord, the *Seigneur*'. If, like him, they had a sense of grandeur, lovers and husbands who practise endearments before intercourse would experience these mighty metamorphoses at little cost. 'He sniffed vaguely at this woman's face, *like a lion* that, tearing to pieces the meat held between his paws, stops now and then to lick it.'

[1] *Le Songe.*

[2] *Les Jeuines Filles.* The four following quotations are also from this work.

This carnivorous arrogance is not the only pleasure derived by the male from his female; she is the pretext for him to experiment with his own feelings freely and always without risk, firing blanks, so to speak. Costals, one night, will amuse himself even by suffering until, having had enough of his pain, he cheerfully attacks a chicken leg. Only rarely can one permit oneself such a caprice. But there are other joys, lordly or subtle. For instance, condescension; Costals condescends to reply to certain letters from women, and sometimes even takes some pains about it. To an ambitious little country girl he wrote at the end of a pedantic dissertation: 'I doubt whether you can understand me, but that is much better than for me to have *come down* to your level.' It pleases him at times to model a woman in his image: 'I want you to be like my scarf . . . I have not *raised* you to my level for you to be anything different from myself.' He amuses himself in creating some pleasant memories for Solange. But it is above all when he sleeps with a woman that he rapturously senses his own prodigality. Giver as he is of joy, giver of peace, of warmth, of strength, of pleasure, he comes laden with the riches he dispenses. He owes nothing to his mistresses; often he pays them so as to make sure; but even when the intercourse is without payment, the woman is unilaterally his debtor: she gives nothing, he takes.

The first duty of a woman is to submit to the demands of his generosity; when he fancies that Solange does not appreciate his caresses, Costals becomes white with rage. If he cares for Radidja, it is because her face lights up with joy when he possesses her. Then he enjoys feeling himself at once the beast of prey and the magnificent prince. One asks with some perplexity, however, what can be the origin of the frenzy to take and overwhelm if the woman taken and overwhelmed is only a poor thing, insipid flesh in which stirs a substitute consciousness. How can Costals waste so much time with these empty creatures? These contradictions indicate the worth of a pride that is only vanity.

A more subtle pleasure for the strong, the generous, the masterful, is pity for the wretched. Now and then Costals is moved to feel in his heart such brotherly concern, such sympathy for the humble, such 'pity for women'.[1] What can be more touching than the unexpected gentleness of hard men? He fancies himself like that noble statue in Epinal when he

[1] One of his works is actually entitled *Pitié pour les femmes*! —Tr.

bends over these sick animals—that is, women. He even likes to see sportswomen defeated, wounded, tired out, bruised; as for the rest, he wants them to be as defenceless as possible. He may happen to yield to this pity, to go as far as making promises, if not to the point of keeping them: he promises to help Andrée, to marry Solange. When pity departs from his soul, these promises die: has he not the right to contradict himself? He is the one who makes the rules of the game he plays, with himself as sole partner.

Inferior, pitiful—this is not enough. Montherlant wishes woman to be contemptible. He asserts sometimes that the conflict between desire and contempt is a drama of pathos: 'Ah, to desire what one disdains, what a tragedy! ... To have to attract and repulse in almost a single movement, to light and throw away quickly as we do with a match—such is the tragedy of our relations with women!'[1] In truth there is no tragedy except from the point of view of the match, a negligible point of view. As for the match-lighter, careful not to burn his fingers, it is only too clear that this action enchants him. If it did not please him to 'desire what he disdains', he would not systematically refuse to desire what he esteems: Alban would not repulse Dominique, he would choose to 'love in equality'; and he could avoid so much disdaining of what he desires: after all, it is hard to see *a priori* what is so contemptible in a little Spanish dancer who is young, pretty, ardent, and sincere. Is it because she is poor, of low class, uncultured? One fears that in Montherlant's eyes these are indeed defects. But, above all, he scorns her as being a woman, on principle. He says truly enough that it is not the feminine mystery that causes male dreams, but rather these dreams that create the mystery. But he, too, projects into the object what he subjectively calls for: it is not because they are contemptible that he disdains women, it is because he would disdain them that they seem to him so abject. He feels that he tarries on heights that are the more lofty the greater the distance is between the women and himself.

This explains why he selects for his heroes ladyloves wanting in wealth and refinement. For the great writer Costals he provides a provincial old maid tormented by sex and ennui, and a lower-middle-class woman, unsophisticated and full of self-interest. It is gauging a superior person with very humble units of measurement, and the result of this maladroit if prudent procedure is that he seems to us quite small. But no

[1] *La Petite Infante de Castille.*

matter, Costals believes himself great. The most minor weaknesses of woman are enough to feed his vanity. When he is disgusted with a sweaty and odorous woman, he abolishes all his own bodily secretions: he is a pure spirit served by muscles and a sex of steel. 'Disdain is more noble than desire', declares Montherlant in *Aux fontaines du désir*; and Alvaro cries in *Le Maître de Santiago*;[1] 'Disgust is bread to me.' What an alibi scorn is when one is feeling well pleased with oneself! From the fact that one ponders and judges, one feels oneself radically different from the other whom one condemns, one clears oneself without cost from the faults of which one accuses the other. With what frenzy has Montherlant all his life given vent to his contempt for people! To denounce their stupidity is enough to make him consider himself intelligent, their cowardice to feel courageous. At the beginning of the Nazi occupation of France he threw himself into an orgy of scorn for his defeated compatriots: *he* is neither French nor defeated, he soars above it all. In an indirect phrase he agrees that on the whole he, Montherlant, who is doing the accusing, did no more than the others to prevent the defeat; he was not even willing to serve as an officer. But forthwith he takes up his accusations with a fury that carries him far away from his own case.[2] If he pretends to be very sorry for his feelings of disgust, it is to feel them more sincerely and enjoy them the more. In fact, he finds so many conveniences in this sort of thing that he seeks systematically to drag woman down into abjectness. He amuses himself tempting poor girls with money or jewels: if they accept his malevolent present, he is jubilant. He plays a sadistic game with Andrée for amusement, not to make her suffer but to see her abase herself. He incites Solange to infanticide; she accepts the prospect, and Costals's senses take fire: he possesses this potential murderess in a ravishment of scorn.

The key to this attitude is given us by his fable of the caterpillars: whatever may have been its hidden intent, it is sufficiently significant as it stands.[3] Urinating on some caterpillars, Montherlant amuses himself by sparing certain ones, by exterminating others; he bestows a laughing pity upon such as struggle for life and generously lets them have their chance; this game enchants him. Without the caterpillars the urinary

[1] Published in translation in *The Master of Santiago* with four other plays (Alfred A. Knopf, 1951).—Tr.

[2] *Le Solstice de juin*, p. 301.

[3] Ibid., p. 286.

stream would have been only an excretion; it becomes an instrument of life or death; before the crawling insects, the man relieving his bladder knows the despotic solitude of God —not to be threatened in return. Thus in dealing with woman-beasts the male, from the height of his pedestal, now cruel, now kind, just and capricious in turn, gives, takes away, gratifies, shows pity, gets irritated; he acts only in accordance with his good pleasure; he is supreme, free, unique. But these beasts must remain nothing but beasts; they will be selected on purpose, their weaknesses will be humoured, they will be treated as beasts with such mad obstinacy that they will in the end accept their status. In the same way the whites of Louisiana and Georgia are delighted with the little pilferings and fibs of the blacks; they feel reassured of the superiority conferred by their skin colour; and if one of these Negroes persists in being honest, he will be maltreated the more for it. And similarly in the concentration camps the abasement of men was systematically carried out: the Master Race found in this abjection proof that it was indeed of superhuman essence.

To judge the validity of Montherlant's attitude towards women, it will be well to examine his ethics more closely. For in the end we must know *in the name of what* women are, in his view, to be condemned. His attitude has no positive counterpart that might serve as its explanation; it expresses only his own existential choice. In truth, this hero has chosen fear. There is in every consciousness an aspiration towards sovereignty; but it can take affirmative action only in risking itself. No superiority is ever given, since man is nothing when reduced to his subjectivity; hierarchies can be set up only in accordance with men's acts and works; merit must be continually redemonstrated. Montherlant says so himself. 'One has rights over only that which one is ready to risk.' But he has never been ready to risk *himself* among his equals. And it is because he does not dare to confront humanity that he does away with it. 'An enraging obstacle, these human beings,' says the King in *La Reine morte*. The trouble is that they give the lie to the agreeable fairyland that the man of vanity creates around himself. They must be repudiated. It is noteworthy that *not one* of Montherlant's works paints for us a man-to-man conflict; co-existence is the great living drama, but it eludes him. His hero always stands alone before animals, children, women, landscapes; he is the prey of his own desires (like the Queen in *Pasiphaé*) or of his own

demands (like the Master of Santiago), but there is never *anyone* at his side. Even Alban in *Le Songe* has no comrade: he disdains Prinet alive, and becomes excited about him only over his corpse. Montherlant's works, like his life, admit of only *one* consciousness.

Herewith all sentiment disappears from this universe. There can be no intersubjective relation if there is only one subject. Love is a joke; but it is contemptible not in the name of friendship, for 'friendship lacks guts'.[1] And all human solidarity is haughtily rejected. The hero was not engendered, he is not limited by space and time: 'I see no sensible reason for interesting myself more in outer affairs that are contemporaneous with me than in those of no matter what year of the past.'[2] Nothing happening to another is of any account to him: 'To tell the truth, events have never been of moment to me. I liked them only for the rays they made in me in passing through me . . . Let them be, then, what they will.'[3] Action is impossible: 'To have had ardour, energy, audacity and not to have been able to put them at the disposition of anyone whatever because of lack of confidence in anything human at all!'[4] That is to say, all *transcendence* is prohibited. Montherlant recognizes this. Love and friendship are trifles, scorn prevents action. He does not believe in art for art's sake, and he does not believe in God. There remains only the immanence of pleasure: 'My sole ambition has been to make better use of my senses than others do,' he cries in 1925.[5] And again: 'In sum, what do I want? The possession in peace and poetry of persons who please me.'[6] And in 1941: 'But as for me, I who accuse others, what have I done with these twenty years? They have been as a dream of pleasure for me. I have lived both in length and in breadth, getting drunk on what I like: what a mouth-to-mouth with life!'[7] Well and good. But is it not precisely because she wallows in immanence that woman was trampled upon? What more lofty ends, what grand designs does Montherlant hold up in opposition to the possessive love of the mother and the mistress? He also seeks 'possession'; and when it comes to 'mouth-to-mouth with life',

[1] *Aux fontaines du désir.*
[2] *La Possession de soi-même*, p. 13.
[3] *Le Solstice de juin*, p. 316.
[4] *Aux fontaines du désir.*
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid.
[7] *Le Solstice de juin*, p. 301.

many a woman could give him points. Does he not know that women's sensuality is no less tempestuous than men's? If one is to rank the sexes by this criterion, perhaps women would stand higher than men. In this field Montherlant's incoherencies are monstrous. In the name of 'alternation' he declares that from the very fact that nothing is worth anything, everything is of equal value; he accepts all, he would embrace one and all, and he is pleased when his largeness of spirit terrifies mothers of families. Yet he it was who during the occupation demanded an 'inquisition'[1] to censor films and newspapers. The thighs of girls displayed in American magazines nauseate him; the sleek sex of a bull excites him: every man to his taste. Each one builds 'fairyland' anew after his own fashion; in the name of what values does this great orgiast spit with disgust upon the orgies of others? Because they are not his? But does all morality then consist in being Montherlant?

He would evidently reply that to enjoy is not everything: it must be done with style. Pleasure should be the other aspect of a renunciation, that the voluptuary may feel himself to be also of the stuff of hero and saint. But many women are expert in reconciling their pleasures with the lofty image they have formed of themselves. Why should we believe that Montherlant's narcissistic dreams have more worth than theirs?

For, truly, it is with dreams that we are dealing. The words with which Montherlant juggles—grandeur, sanctity, heroism—are but futilities because he denies them any objective meaning. Montherlant has been afraid to risk his superiority among men; to make himself drunk on that heady wine, he retired into the clouds: the Unique is surely supreme. He shuts himself up in a chamber of illusion: the mirrors send back his reflection repeated to infinity and he believes that he suffices to populate the world; but he is only a recluse, the prisoner of himself. He thinks he is free, but he sells his liberty for the profit of his ego. Alban repulses Dominique because, seeing himself in a mirror, he finds his moronic visage illustrates that slavery. One is in fact a moron only in the eyes of others. The proud Alban subordinates his feelings to that collective consciousness

[1] 'We demand an organization having discretionary power to arrest all who might, in its judgment, injure the human quality of the French. A kind of inquisition in the name of the human quality of the French.' (Ibid., p. 270.)

which he scorns. Montherlant's liberty is an attitude, not a reality. Action being impossible for him, since he has no aim, he consoles himself with gestures: he is a mime. Women make convenient partners, they give him his cue, he takes for himself the leading role, he wreaths his own brow with the laurel of victory and assumes the purple robe. But it all takes place on his private stage; thrown before the public, in real daylight, under a real sky, our comedian no longer sees clearly, no longer stands erect, he reels, he falls. Costals cries in a moment of lucidity: 'At bottom what buffoonery are these "victories" over women!'[1] Yes. The values, the accomplishments offered us by Montherlant are a sad buffoonery. The lofty deeds that intoxicate him are but gestures, never real undertakings: he is touched by the suicide of Peregrinus, by the audacity of Pasiphaë, by the elegance of the Japanese gentleman who sheltered his opponent under his umbrella before finishing him off in a duel. But he declares that 'the person of the opponent and the ideas he is supposed to represent are not, then, of so very great importance'.[2] This declaration had a peculiar ring in 1941. All war is beautiful, he says again, whatever the outcome; strength is always to be admired, whatever cause it serves. 'Combat without faith is the formula to which we are forced in the end, if we wish to maintain the only acceptable concept of man: that in which he is at once hero and sage.'[3] Montherlant's lofty indifference to all causes and his preference for the pseudo-sublime are illustrated in *La Reine morte* and *Le Maître de Santiago*.

In these dramas, both significant in their pretentiousness, we see two imperial males who sacrifice to their empty pride women guilty of nothing more than being human: for punishment one loses her life, the other her soul. Once again, if we ask in the name of what, the author haughtily answers: in the name of nothing. He did not want the King to have too clear motives of state for killing Ines; for then this murder would be only a commonplace political crime. 'Why am I killing her? There is doubtless a reason, but I cannot pick it out,' he says. The reason is that the solar principle must triumph over terrestrial banality; but this principle, as we realize, illuminates no goal: it requires destruction, nothing more. As for Alvaro, Montherlant tells us in a preface that, regarding certain men of that time, he takes an interest in 'their clear-cut

[1] *Les Jeunes Filles.*

[2] *Le Solstice de juin*, p. 211.

[3] *Le Solstice de juin*, p. 211.

faith, their scorn of outer reality, their relish for ruin, their craze for nothingness'. It is to this craze, indeed, that the master of Santiago sacrifices his daughter. Perhaps it might be embellished with the iridescent word *mystical*. Is it not stupid to prefer happiness to mysticism? The truth is that sacrifices and renunciations make sense only in the perspective of an aim, a human purpose; and aims that transcend individual love and personal happiness can take shape only in a world that recognizes the value both of love and of happiness; 'shopgirl morality' is more authentic than fairy tales of emptiness because it has its roots in life and reality, whence the higher aspirations can arise. It is easy to imagine Ines de Castro at Buchenwald, and the King officiously bustling about the German Embassy for reasons of state. Many a little shopgirl during the occupation earned a respect we do not accord to Montherlant. He is full of superficial words that are dangerous by reason of their very emptiness: his extreme mysticism sanctions any amount of temporal devastation. What happens is that in the dramas we are discussing this mysticism finds expression through two murders, one physical, the other moral; Alvaro—grim, alone, ignored—has not far to go to become a Grand Inquisitor; nor the King—misunderstood, denied—a Himmler. One kills women, kills Jews, kills effeminate men and Christians under Jewish influence, one kills all one has interest or pleasure in killing, in the name of these lofty ideas. Mystical negatives can be expressed only through negations. True transcendence is a positive movement towards the future, man's future. The false hero, to persuade himself that he has travelled far, that he soars high aloft, looks constantly backwards and downwards; he scorns, he accuses, he oppresses, he persecutes, he tortures, he murders. He regards himself as superior to his neighbour by virtue of the wrong he does him. Such are the summits that Montherlant points out to us with a haughty gesture, when he pauses momentarily from his 'mouth-to-mouth with life'.

'Like the donkey working the Arab water-wheel, I turn, I turn, blindly, endlessly retracing my steps. But I never bring up fresh water.' There is little to be added to this avowal signed by Montherlant in 1927. The fresh water has never gushed forth. Perhaps Montherlant should have lighted the pyre of Peregrinus: it was the most logical solution. He has preferred to take refuge in self-worship. Instead of giving himself to this world, which he knew not how to fertilize, he was content to see himself reflected in it; and he ordered his

life in accordance with this mirage, a mirage visible in no eyes but his. 'Princes are at ease under all circumstances, even in defeat,' he writes;[1] and because he enjoys the defeat, he thinks he is king. He has learned from Neitzsche that 'woman is the diversion of the hero', and he thinks that to divert himself with women is all that is needed to make a hero of him. And so on after the same fashion. As Costals says, 'At bottom, what dreadful buffoonery!'

## II

### D. H. LAWRENCE OR PHALLIC PRIDE

Lawrence is poles apart from a Montherlant. Not for him to define the special relations of woman and of man, but to restore both of them to the verity of Life. This verity lies neither in display nor in the will: it involves animality, in which the human being has his roots. Lawrence passionately rejects the antithesis: sex—brain; he has a cosmic optimism that is radically opposed to the pessimism of Schopenhauer; the will-to-live expressed in the phallus is joy, and herein should be the source of thought and action unless these are to be respectively empty concept and sterile mechanism. The sex cycle pure and simple is not enough because it falls back into immanence: it is a synonym of death; but still this mutilated reality, sex and death, is better than an existence cut off from the humus of the flesh. Man needs more than, like Antaeus, to renew contact now and then with the earth; his life as a man should be wholly an expression of his virility, which immediately presupposes and demands woman. She is therefore neither diversion nor prey; she is not an object confronting a subject, but a pole necessary for the existence of the pole of opposite sign. Men who have misunderstood this truth, a Napoleon for example, have failed of their destiny as men: they are defectives. It is not by asserting his singularity, but by fulfilling his generality as intensely as possible that the individual can be saved: male or female, one should never seek in erotic relations the triumph of one's pride or the exaltation of one's ego; to use one's sex as tool of the will, that is the fatal mistake; one must break the barriers of the ego, transcend even the limits of consciousness, renounce all

[1] *Le Solstice de juin*, p. 312.

personal sovereignty. Nothing could be more beautiful than that little statue of a woman in labour: 'A terrible face void, peaked, *abstracted almost into meaninglessness* by the weight of sensation beneath.'[1]

This ecstasy is one neither of sacrifice nor abandon; there is no question of either of the two sexes permitting the other to swallow it up; neither man nor woman should seem like a 'broken-off fragment' of a couple; the sex part is not a still aching scar; each member of the couple is a complete being, perfectly polarized; when one feels assured in his virility, the other in her femininity, 'each acknowledges the perfection of the polarized sex circuit';[2] the sexual act is, without annexing, without surrender of either partner, a marvellous fulfilment of each one by the other. When Ursula and Birkin finally found each other, they gave each other reciprocally that stellar equilibrium which alone can be called liberty. 'She was for him what he was for her, the immemorial magnificence of the *other reality,* mystic and palpable.'[3] Having access to each other in the generous extortion of passion, two lovers together have access to the Other, the All. Thus with Paul and Clara in the moment of love:[4] 'What was she? A strong, strange wild life, that breathed with his in the darkness through this hour. It was all so much bigger than themselves that he was hushed. They had met, and included in their meeting the thrust of the manifold grass-stems, the cry of the peewit, the wheel of the stars.' Lady Chatterley and Mellors attained to the same cosmic joys: blending one with the other, they blend with the trees, the light, the rain. Lawrence develops his doctrine broadly in *The Defence of Lady Chatterley*:[5] 'Marriage is only an illusion if it is not lastingly and radically phallic, if it is not bound to the sun and the earth, to the moon, to the stars and planets, to the rhythm of the seasons, the years, the lustra, and the centuries. Marriage is nothing if it is not based on a correspondence of blood. For blood is the substance of the soul.' 'The blood of man and the blood of woman are two eternally different streams which cannot mix.' That is why these two streams embrace the totality of life in their meanderings. 'The phallus is a quantity of blood that fills the valley of blood in the female. The powerful stream of masculine

[1] *Women in Love.*

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] *Sons and Lovers,* p. 415.

[5] These passages are translated from the French version.—Tr.

blood overwhelms in its ultimate depths the grand stream of feminine blood . . . however, neither breaks through its barriers. It is the most perfect form of communion . . . and it is one of the greatest of mysteries.' This communion is a miraculous enrichment of life ; but it demands that the claims of the 'personality' be abolished. When personalities seek to reach each other without renouncing themselves, as is common in modern civilization, their attempt is doomed to frustration. There is in such cases a sexuality 'personal, blank, cold, nervous, poetic,' which tends to disintegrate the vital stream of each. The lovers treat each other as instruments, engendering hate: so it is with Lady Chatterley and Michaelis ; they remain shut up in their subjectivity ; they can experience a fever such as alcohol or opium gives, but it is without object: they fail each to discover the reality of the other ; they gain access to nothing. Lawrence would have condemned Costals without appeal. He has painted in the figure of Gerard, in *Women in Love,* one of these proud and egoistic males ; and Gerard is in large part responsible for the hell into which he hurls himself with Gudrun. Cerebral, wilful, he delights in the empty assertion of his ego and hardens himself against life: for the pleasure of mastering a fiery mare, he keeps her head at a gate behind which a train passes with thunderous commotion ; he draws blood from her rebellious flanks and intoxicates himself with his own power. This will to domination abases the woman against whom it is exercised ; lacking strength, she is transformed into a slave. Gerard leans over Pussum: 'Her inchoate look of a violated slave, whose fulfilment lies in her further and further violation, made his nerves quiver . . . his was the only will, she was the passive substance of his will.' That is a miserable kind of domination ; if the woman is only a passive substance, what the male dominates is nothing. He thinks he is taking something, enriching himself: it is a delusion. Gerard takes Gudrun in his arms: 'she was the rich, lovely substance of his being . . . So she was passed away and gone in him, and he was perfected.' But as soon as he leaves her, he finds himself alone and empty ; and the next day she fails to come to the rendezvous. If the woman is strong, the male demand arouses a similar, symmetrical demand in her ; fascinated and rebellious, she becomes masochistic and sadistic in turn. Gudrun is overwhelmed with agitation when she sees Gerard press the flanks of the raging mare between his thighs, but she is agitated also when Gerard's nurse tells her

'many's the time I've pinched his little bottom for him.' Masculine arrogance provokes feminine resistance. While Ursula is conquered and saved by the sexual purity of Birkin, as Lady Chatterley was by that of the gamekeeper, Gerard drags Gudrun into a struggle without end. One night, unhappy, broken down by mourning for his father, he let himself go in her arms. 'She was the great bath of life, he worshipped her. Mother and substance of all life she was . . . But the miraculous, soft effluence of her breast suffused over him, over his seared, damaged brain, like a healing lymph, like a soft, soothing flow of life itself, perfect as if he were bathed in the womb again.' That night they feel something of what a communion with woman could be; but it is too late; his happiness is vitiated, for Gudrun is not really present; she lets Gerard sleep on her shoulder, but she stays awake, impatient, separate. It is the punishment meted out to the individual who is a victim of himself: he cannot, being solitary, invade her solitude; in raising the barriers of his ego, he has raised those of the Other: he will never be reunited with her. At the end Gerard dies, killed by Gudrun and by himself.

Thus it would at first appear that neither of the two sexes has an advantage. Neither is subject. Woman is no more a mere pretext than she is man's prey. Malraux[1] notes that for Lawrence it is not enough, as it is for the Hindu, that woman be the occasion for contact with the infinite, like, for example, a landscape: that would be making an object of her, in another fashion. She is just as real as the man, and a real communion is what he should achieve. This is why the heroes who have Lawrence's approval demand from their mistresses much more than the gift of their bodies; Paul does not permit Miriam to give herself to him as a tender sacrifice; Birkin does not want Ursula to limit herself to seeking pleasure in his arms; cold or burning, the woman who remains closed up within herself leaves man to his solitude: he should repulse her. Both ought to give themselves body and soul. If this gift were made, they would remain for ever faithful. Lawrence is a partisan of monogamous marriage. There is the quest for variety only if one is interested in the peculiarities of individuals; but phallic marriage is founded on generality. When the virility-femininity circuit is established, desire for change is inconceivable: it is a complete circuit, closed and definitive.

[1] Preface to *L'Amant de Lady Chatterley*.

Reciprocal gift, reciprocal fidelity: have we here in truth the reign of mutuality? Far from it. Lawrence believes passionately in the supremacy of the male. The very expression 'phallic marriage', the equivalence he sets up between 'sexual' and 'phallic', constitute sufficient proof. Of the two blood streams that are mysteriously married, the phallic current is favoured. 'The phallus serves as a means of union between two rivers; it conjoins the two different rhythms into a single flow.' Thus the man is not only one of the two elements in the couple, but also their connecting factor; he provides their transcendence: 'The bridge to the future is the phallus.' For the cult of the Goddess Mother, Lawrence means to substitute a phallic cult; when he wishes to illuminate the sexual nature of the cosmos, it is not woman's abdomen but man's virility that he calls to mind. He almost never shows a man agitated by a woman; but time and again he shows woman secretly overwhelmed by the ardent, subtle, and insinuating appeal of the male. His heroines are beautiful and healthy, but not heady; whereas his heroes are disquieting fauns. It is male animals that incarnate the agitation and the powerful mystery of Life; women feel the spell: this one is affected by a fox, that one is taken with a stallion, Gudrun feverishly challenges a herd of young oxen; she is overwhelmed by the rebellious vigour of a rabbit.

A social advantage for man is grafted upon this cosmic advantage. No doubt because the phallic stream is impetuous, aggressive, because it spreads into the future—Lawrence explains himself but imperfectly—it is for man to 'carry forward the banner of life';[1] he is intent upon aims and ends, he incarnates transcendence; woman is absorbed in her sentiment, she is all inwardness; she is dedicated to immanence. Not only does man play the active role in the sexual life, but he is active also in going beyond it; he is rooted in the sexual world, but he makes his escape from it; woman remains shut up in it. Thought and action have their roots in the phallus; lacking the phallus, woman has no rights in either the one or the other: she can play a man's role, and even brilliantly, but it is just a game, lacking serious verity. 'Woman is really polarized downwards towards the centre of the earth. Her deep positivity is in the downward flow, the moon-pull. And man is polarized upwards, towards the sun and the day's activity.'[2] For woman

[1] *Fantasia of the Unconscious.*

[2] Ibid., p. 279.

'the deepest consciousness is in the loins and the belly'.[1] If this is perverted and her flow of energy is upwards, to the breast and head, woman may become clever, noble, efficient, brilliant, competent in the manly world; but, according to Lawrence, she soon has enough of it, everything collapses, and she returns to sex, 'which is her business at the present moment'.[2] In the domain of action man should be the initiator, the positive; woman is the positive on the emotional level.

Thus Lawrence rediscovers the traditional bourgeois conception of Bonald, of Auguste Comte, of Clément Vautel. Woman should subordinate her existence to that of man. 'She ought to believe in you, and in the deep purpose you stand for.'[3] Then man will pay her an infinite tenderness and gratitude. 'Ah, how good it is to come home to your wife when she *believes* in you and submits to your purpose that is beyond her . . . You feel unfathomable gratitude to the woman who loves you.'[4] Lawrence adds that to merit such devotion, the man must be genuinely occupied with a great design; if his project is but a false goal, the couple breaks down in low deceptiveness. Better to shut oneself up again in the feminine cycle of love and death, like Anna Karenina and Vronsky, Carmen and Don José, than to lie to each other like Pierre and Natasha.

But there is always this reservation: what Lawrence is extolling—after the fashion of Proudhon and Rousseau—is monogamous marriage in which the wife derives the justification of her existence from the husband. Lawrence writes as hatefully as Montherlant against the wife who wishes to reverse the roles. Let her cease playing the Magna Mater, claiming to have in her keeping the verity of life; monopolizing, devouring, she mutilates the male, causing him to fall back into immanence and turning him away from his purposes. Lawrence is far from execrating maternity: quite the contrary. He is glad to be flesh, he willingly accepts his birth, he is fond of his mother; mothers appear in his works as splendid examples of true femininity; they are pure renunciation, absolute generosity, all their living warmth is devoted to their children: they gladly accept their sons becoming men, they are proud of it. But one

[1] *Fantasia of the Unconscious.*

[2] Ibid., p. 280.

[3] Ibid., p. 285.

[4] Ibid., pp. 287-8.

should fear the egoistic *amante* who would take a man back to his childhood; she hampers the *élan*, the flight of the male. 'The moon, the planet of women, sways us back.'[1] She talks unceasingly of love; but for her love is to take, it is to fill this void she feels within her; such love is close to hate. Thus Hermione, suffering from a terrible sense of deficiency because she has never been able to give herself, wants to annex Birkin. She fails. She tries to kill him, and the voluptuous ecstasy she feels in striking him is identical with the egoistic spasm of sex pleasure.[2]

Lawrence detests modern women, creatures of celluloid and rubber laying claim to a consciousness. When woman has become sexually conscious of herself, 'there she is functioning away from her own head and her own consciousness of herself and her own automatic self-will.'[3] He forbids her to have an independent sensuality; she is made to give herself, not to take. Through Mellors's mouth, Lawrence cries aloud his horror of lesbians. But he finds fault also with the woman who in the presence of the male takes a detached or aggressive attitude; Paul feels wounded and irritated when Miriam caresses his loins and says to him: 'you are beautiful'. Gudrun, like Miriam, is at fault when she feels enchanted with the good looks of her lover: this contemplation separates them, as much as would the irony of frozen intellectual females who find the penis comic or male gymnastics ridiculous. The eager quest for pleasure is not less to be condemned: there is an intense, solitary enjoyment that also causes separation, and woman should not strain for it. Lawrence has drawn numerous portraits of these independent, dominating women, who miss their feminine vocation. Ursula and Gudrun are of this type. At first Ursula is a monopolizer. 'Man must render himself up to her. He must be quaffed to the dregs by her.'[4] She will learn to conquer her desire. But Gudrun is obstinate; cerebral, artistic, she mildly envies men their independence and their chances for activity; she perseveres in keeping her individuality intact; she wants to live for herself; she is ironic and possessive, and she will always remain shut up in her subjectivity.

Miriam, in *Sons and Lovers*, is the most significant figure

[1] *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, p. 286.

[2] *Women in Love*.

[3] *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, p. 114.

[4] *Women in Love*, p. 302.

because she is the least sophisticated. Gerard is in part responsible for Gudrun's failure; but Miriam, as far as Paul is concerned, carries her weight of unhappiness alone. She too would rather be a man, and she hates men; she is not satisfied with herself as a woman, she wants to 'distinguish herself'; so the grand stream of life does not flow through her. She can be like a sorceress or a priestess, never like a bacchante; she is stirred by things only when she has re-created them in her soul, giving them a religious value: this very fervour separates her from life; she is poetical, mystical, maladjusted. 'Her exaggerated effort locked itself . . . she was not awkward and yet she never made the right movement.' She seeks inward joys, and reality frightens her; sexuality scares her; when she is in bed with Paul her heart stands apart in a kind of horror; she is always consciousness, never life. She is not a companion; she refuses to melt and blend with her lover; she wishes to absorb him into herself. He is irritated by this desire of hers, he flies into a violent rage when he sees her caressing flowers: one would say that she wanted to tear out their hearts. He insults her: 'You are a beggar of love; you have no need of loving, but of being loved. You wish to *fill yourself full of love* because you lack something, I don't know what.' Sexuality was not made for filling voids; it should be the expression of a whole being. What women call love is their avidity before the virile force of which they want to take possession. Paul's mother thinks clearly regarding Miriam: 'she wants all of him, she wants to extract him from himself and devour him'. The young girl is glad when Paul is sick, because she can take care of him: she pretends to serve him, but it is really a method of imposing her will upon him. Because she remains apart from Paul, she raises in him 'an ardour comparable to fever, such as opium induces'; but she is quite incapable of bringing him joy and peace; from the depth of her love, within her secret self 'she detested Paul because he loved her and dominated her'. And Paul edges away from her. He seeks his equilibrium with Clara; beautiful, lively, animal, she gives herself unreservedly; and they attain moments of ecstasy which transcend them both; but Clara does not understand this revelation. She thinks she owes this joy to Paul himself, to his special nature, and she wishes to take him for herself. She fails to keep him because she, too, wants him all for herself. As soon as love is individualized, it is changed into avid egotism, and the miracle of eroticism vanishes.

Woman must give up personal love; neither Mellors nor Don Cipriano is willing to say words of love to his mistress. Teresa, the model wife, is indignant when Kate asks her if she loves Don Ramón.[1] 'He is my life,' she replies; the gift she has yielded to him is something quite other than love. Woman should, like man, abdicate from all pride and self-will; if she incarnates life for the man, so does he for her; Lady Chatterley finds peace and joy only because she recognizes this truth: 'she would give up her hard and brilliant feminine power, which fatigued and hardened her, she would plunge into the new bath of life, into the depths of its entrails where sang the voiceless song of adoration'; then is she summoned to the rapture of bacchantes; blindly obeying her lover, seeking not herself in his arms, she composes with him a harmonious couple, in tune with the rain, the trees, and the flowers of springtime. Just so Ursula in Birkin's arms renounces her individuality, and they attain to a 'stellar equilibrium'. But *The Plumed Serpent* best reflects Lawrence's ideal in its integrity. For Don Cipriano is one of those men who 'carry forward the banners of life'; he has a mission to which he is so completely devoted that in him virility is transcended and exalted to the point of divinity: if he has himself anointed god, it is not a mystification; it is simply that every man who is fully man is a god; he merits therefore the absolute devotion of a woman. Full of Occidental prejudices, Kate at first refuses to accept this dependence, she clings to her personality and to her limited existence; but little by little she lets herself be penetrated by the great stream of life; she gives Cipriano her body and her soul. This is not a surrender to slavery; for before deciding to live with him she demands that he acknowledge his need for her; he does acknowledge it since in fact woman is necessary to man; then she agrees never to be anything other than his mate; she adopts his aims, his values, his universe. This submission is expressed even in their erotic relation; Lawrence does not want the woman to be tensed in the effort towards her acme of pleasure, separated from the male by the spasm that shakes her; he deliberately denies her the orgasm; Don Cipriano moves away from Kate when he feels her approaching that nervous enjoyment: 'the white ecstasy of frictional satisfaction, the throes of Aphrodite of the foam'; she renounces even this sexual autonomy. 'Her strange seething feminine will and desire subsided in her and swept away,

[1] *The Plumed Serpent* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1926, 1951), p. 408.

leaving her soft and powerfully potent, like the hot springs of water that gushed up so noiseless, so soft, yet so powerful, with a sort of secret potency.'[1]

We can see why Lawrence's novels are, above all, 'guide-books for women'. It is much more difficult for woman than for man to 'accept the universe', for man submits to the cosmic order autonomously, whereas woman needs the mediation of the male. There is really a surrender when for woman the Other takes the shape of an alien consciousness and will; on the contrary, an autonomous submission, as by man, remarkably resembles a sovereign decision. Either the heroes of Lawrence are condemned at the start, or from the start they hold the secret of wisdom;[2] their submission to the cosmos has been accomplished so long since, and they derive from it so much inner certainty, that they seem as arrogant as any proud individualist; there is a god who speaks through them: Lawrence himself. As for woman, it is for her to bow down before their divinity. In so far as man is a phallus and not a brain, the individual who has his share of virility keeps his advantages; woman is not evil, she is even good—but subordinated. It is once more the ideal of the 'true woman' that Lawrence has to offer us—that is, the woman who unreservedly accepts being defined as the Other.

## III

### CLAUDEL AND THE HANDMAID OF THE LORD

The originality of Claudel's Catholicism lies in an optimism so stubborn that evil itself is turned into good.

> Evil itself
> Involves its good which we must not permit to be lost.[3]

[1] Ibid., p. 422. Lawrence presents Kate's approach to 'orgiastic satisfaction' as 'repulsive' to Cipriano; and he says of her that after 'the first moment of disappointment . . . came the knowledge that she did not really want it, that it was really nauseous to her'. All this dreadful nonsense seems hardly worth the dignity of citation, except as it pitilessly exposes Lawrence's basic view of woman.—TR.

[2] Excepting Paul of *Sons and Lovers,* the most alive of all of them. But this is the only one of the novels which shows us a masculine apprenticeship.

[3] *Partage de Midi.*

Claudel approves of all creation, adopting the point of view which cannot fail to be that of the Creator—since the latter is supposed to be all-powerful, omniscient, and benevolent. Without hell and sin, there would be neither free will nor salvation; when He caused this world to rise out of nothing, God foresaw the Fall and the Redemption. In the eyes of both Jews and Christians, Eve's disobedience put her daughters at a great disadvantage; everyone knows how severely the Fathers of the Church berated woman. But on the contrary we shall see her justified if we admit that she has served to forward the divine purposes. 'Woman! that service she once upon a time rendered to God through her disobedience in the Garden of Eden; that deep understanding established between her and Him; that flesh which through the Fall she gave over to the Redemption!'[1] And certainly she is the source of sin, and through her man lost Eden. But the sins of men have been redeemed, and this world is blessed anew: 'We have by no means departed from that delightful paradise where God first placed us!'[2] 'All the earth is the Promised Land'.[3]

Nothing that has come from the hand of God, nothing that He has given can be bad in itself: 'Nothing that He has made is fruitless.'[4] And there is even nothing that is not necessary. 'All the things He has created . . . are simultaneously necessary to each other.'[5] Thus woman has her place in the harmony of the universe; but this is not an ordinary place; there is 'a strange passion and, in Lucifer's eyes, a scandalous one, which binds the Eternal to that momentary flowering of Nothingness.'[6]

Most assuredly woman can be a destroyer: Claudel has incarnated in Lechy[7] the bad woman leading man to perdition; in *Partage de Midi,* Ysé ruins the life of men snared in her love. But if there were not this danger of ruin, no more would salvation exist. Woman is the 'element of hazard which He has deliberately introduced into His colossal construction'.[8] It is good that man should know the temptations

[1] *Les Aventures de Sophie.*
[2] *La Cantate à trois voix.*
[3] *Conversations dans le Loir-et-Cher.*
[4] *Le Soulier de satin.*
[5] *L'Annonce faite à Marie.*
[6] *Les Aventures de Sophie.*
[7] *L'Echange.*
[8] Ibid.

of the flesh. 'It is this enemy within us that gives our life its dramatic element, this poignant salt. If the soul were not thus brutally attacked, it would be asleep, and behold, it leaps up ... Through battle is the way to victory.'[1] Not only by the way of the spirit, but by the way of the flesh is man called upon to become aware of his soul. 'And what flesh more powerful for speaking to man than woman?'[2] All that tears him from slumber, from security, is useful ; love in whatever form it comes has his virtue of appearing as a profoundly disturbing element 'in our little personal world, set in order by our mediocre reason'.[3] Very often woman is but a deceptive bearer of illusion: 'I am the promise which cannot be kept and my charm lies in just that. I am the sweetness of what is, with the regret for what is not.'[4] But there is usefulness also in illusion ; this is what the Gardian Angel proclaims to Donna Prouhèze:

> Even sin! Sin also serves!
> So it was good that he loved me?
> It was good that you taught him desire.
> Desire for an illusion? For a shadow that for ever escapes him?
> The desire is for what is, the illusion is of what is not.
> Desire through illusion
> Is for what is, through what is not.[5]

Prouhèze by the will of God has been for Rodrigue: 'A sword through his heart.'[6]

But woman is not only this blade in God's hand ; the good things of this world are not always to be declined: they are also sustenance ; man is to take them and make them his own. The well-beloved will embody for him all the appreciable beauty of the universe ; she will be a canticle of adoration upon his lips. 'How beautiful you are, Violaine, and how beautiful is this world, where you are!'[7]

'Let me breathe your fragrance, which is as the fragrance

[1] *L'Oiseau noir dans le soleil levant.*
[2] *Le Soulier de satin.*
[3] *Positions et propositions.*
[4] *La Ville.*
[5] *Le Soulier de satin.*
[6] Ibid.
[7] *L'Annonce faite à Marie.*

of the earth, when, bright, washed with water like an altar, it produces blue and yellow flowers.'

'And as the fragrance of summer, which is scented with straw and grass, and as the fragrance of autumn.'[1]

She sums up all nature: rose and lily, star, fruit, bud, wind, moon, sun, fountain, 'the placid commotion of a great seaport in the noonday sun'.[2] And she is still much more—a fellow being: 'Someone human, like myself. . . .'[3]

'Someone to listen to what I say and to have confidence in me.'

'A companion with gentle voice who takes us in her arms and assures us she is a woman.'[4]

Body and soul, it is by taking her to his heart that man finds his roots in the earth and thereby finds fulfilment. He takes her, and she is not easy to carry, but man is not made to be unattached. He is astonished at this heavy encumbrance, but he will not rid himself of it, for this charge is also precious: 'I am a great treasure,' says Violaine.

Woman fulfils her earthly destiny, reciprocally, by giving herself to man.

'For what use being woman if not to be taken? . . .'

'But you, dear heart, say: I was not created in vain, and he who is chosen to take me surely exists!'

'Ah, what joy for me to fill that heart which awaits me.'[5]

Of course this union of man and woman is to be consummated in the presence of God; it is holy and pertains to the eternal; it should be agreed to through a deep act of the will and cannot be broken according to individual caprice. 'Love, the assent given by two free persons one to the other, has seemed to God so great a thing that He has made a sacrament of it. Here as everywhere the sacrament gives reality to what was only a supreme desire of the heart.'[6] It is not joy alone that the man and the woman give each other through this union. It is sacrifice and the schooling of two souls which will have to be for ever content with one another, says Claudel. Each will gain possession of the other, they will discover each other's souls. Each has come into the world by and for the other. And each appears justified, necessary, through the other, who is thus completed.

[1] *La Ville.*
[2] *Le Soulier de satin.*
[3] *Le Soulier de satin.*
[4] *Le Pain dur.*
[5] *La Cantate à trois voix.*
[6] *Positions et propositions.*

'When could she ever get along without me? When shall I ever cease to be that without which she could not be herself?'

'For what is it we call death if not the ceasing to be necessary?'[1]

In the wonderful necessity of this union, paradise is regained, death conquered:

'Here finally reconstituted from one man and one woman, is that being who was in Paradise.'[2]

'Never otherwise than the one by the other shall we succeed in getting rid of death.'[3]

Finally, under the form of another, each attains to the Other in all completeness—that is, to God. Claudel says that what we give one to the other is God under different aspects, and he suggests that the love of God appeals in the same way as that of fellow creatures to the feeling that by ourselves we are incomplete. The Supreme Good is something outside and beyond us.

Thus each finds in the other the meaning of his terrestrial existence and also irrefutable proof of the insufficiency of this life:

'What I ask of you and what I would give to you is not appropriate to time but to eternity.'[4]

The roles of man and of woman are not exactly symmetrical, however. On the social level man's primacy is evident. Claudel believes in hierarchies and, among others, in that of the family: it is the husband who is the head. Anne Vercors rules over her house. Don Pélage thinks of himself as the gardener who has been entrusted with the care of that delicate plant, Donna Prouhèze; it gives him a mission that she does not dream of refusing him. The mere fact of being a male confers an advantage. 'Who am I, poor girl, to compare myself with the male of my race?' asks Sygne.[5] It is man who ploughs the fields, who builds the cathedrals, who fights with the sword, explores the world, conquers territory—who acts, who undertakes. Through him are accomplished the plans of God upon this earth. Woman appears to be only an auxiliary. She is the one who stays in place, who waits, and who keeps

[1] *Le Soulier de satin.*
[2] *Feuilles de saints.*
[3] *Le Soulier de satin.*
[4] *Le Père humilié.*
[5] *L'Otage.*

things up: 'I am she who remains, and am always there,' says Sygne.

She protects Coûfontaine's inheritance, she keeps his accounts in order while he is away fighting for the Cause. Woman brings to the warrior the succour of hope: 'I bring irresistible hope.[1] And that of pity: 'I have had pity upon him. For where would he turn, seeking his mother, if not to the woman who humbles herself, in a spirit of intimacy and shame.'[2]

Claudel does not hold it against man that woman thus knows him in his feebleness; on the contrary, he would regard as sacrilege the male pride displayed in Montherlant and Lawrence. It is good for man to realize that he is carnal and pitiable, for him not to forget his origin and the death that corresponds to it.

But in marriage the wife gives herself to the husband, who becomes responsible for her: Lala lies on the ground before Cœuvre and he sets his foot upon her. The relation of wife to husband, of daughter to father, of sister to brother, is a relation of vassalage. Sygne in George's hands takes an oath like a knight's to his sovereign, or a nun's when she makes profession of faith.

Fidelity and loyalty are the greatest human virtues of the female vassal. Mild, humble, resigned as woman, she is proud and indomitable in the name of her race, her lineage; such are the proud Sygne of Coûfontaine and Tête d'Or's princess who carries away the body of her slain father on her shoulders, who bears the misery of a rude and solitary life, the agonies of a crucifixion, and who attends Tête d'Or in his anguish before dying at his side. Conciliating, mediating, thus woman often appears to us: she is Esther pliant to the commands of Mordecai, Judith obedient to the priests; her weakness, her timidity, her modesty she can conquer through loyalty to the Cause, which is hers since it is her master's; in her devotion she acquires a strength that makes of her the most valuable of instruments.

On the human plane she thus appears to draw her grandeur from her very subordination. But in the eyes of God she is a perfectly autonomous person. The fact that for man existence is transcended while for woman it simply continues establishes a difference between them only on earth: in any case it is not upon earth that transcendence is fully accomplished, but in

[1] *La Ville.*

[2] *L'Echange.*

God. And woman has with Him a tie as direct as has her companion—more intimate even, and more secret. It is through a man's voice, a priest's, that God speaks to Sygne; but Violaine hears His voice in the solitude of her heart, and Prouhèze has dealings only with the Guardian Angel. Claudel's most sublime figures are women—Sygne, Violaine, Prouhèze. This is in part because sanctity lies, according to him, in renunciation. And woman is less involved with human projects, she has less personal will: being made for giving herself, not for taking, she is closer to perfect devotion. She will be the one to transcend those earthly joys which are legitimate and good, but the sacrifice of which is better yet. Sygne does it for a definite reason: to save the Pope. Prouhèze is resigned to it first of all because she loves Rodrigue with a forbidden love:

'Would you then have wished me to put an adulteress into your arms? . . . I would have been only a woman soon to die upon your breast and not that eternal star for which you thirst.'[1]

But when that love could become legitimate, she makes no attempt to achieve it in this world, for she knows that her true marriage with Rodrigue in some mystical realm can be accomplished only through her denial:

'Then shall I give him to God naked and lacerated, that He may restore him in a thunderclap, then shall I have a spouse and hold a god in my embrace.'[2]

Violaine's resolve is still more mysterious and gratuitious; for she chose leprosy and blindness when she could have been legitimately joined to a man whom she loved and who loved her.

'Perhaps we loved each other too much for it to be just, to be good, for us to have each other.[3]

But if his women are thus remarkably devoted to the heroism of sanctity, it is above all because Claudel still views them in a masculine perspective. To be sure, each sex incarnates the Other in the eyes of the opposite sex; but in man's eyes woman often appears in spite of everything as an *absolute other*. There is a mystical excellence of which 'we know that we are by ourselves incapable and thence comes this power of woman over us which is like that of divine

[1] *Le Soulier de satin.*
[2] Ibid.
[3] *La Jeune Fille Violaine.*

Grace'.[1] The *we* here means males only and not the human species, and as opposed to their imperfection woman is the challenge of the infinite. In a sense we have here a new principle of subordination. Through the communion of saints each individual is an instrument for all the others; but woman is more particularly an instrument of salvation for man, and not vice versa. *Le Soulier de satin* is the epic of Rodrigue's salvation. The drama begins with the prayer that his brother addresses to God in his favour; it ends with the death of Rodrigue, whom Prouhèze has led into sanctity. But, in a different sense, woman thus gains fullest autonomy. For her mission is within her, and, accomplishing the salvation of man or serving as an example for him, she accomplishes in solitude her own salvation. Pierre de Craon foretells her destiny to Violaine, and in his heart he receives the wonderful fruits of her sacrifice; he will exalt her in the eyes of man through the stones of cathedrals. But actually Violaine achieved her salvation without assistance. There is in Claudel a woman-mysticism related to that of Dante before Beatrice, to that of the Gnostics, to that, even, of the Saint-Simonian tradition which calls woman regeneratrix. But from the fact that men and women are equally God's creatures, he attributes an autonomous destiny to her also. So that with him woman fulfils herself as subject by making herself *other*—'I am the Servant of the Lord'; and it is her *pour-soi,* her own free consciousness of self, that she appears as the Other.

There is a passage in the *Aventures de Sophie* that comes close to summing up the whole Claudelian conception. God, we read, has entrusted to woman 'this visage, which, however remote and deformed it may be, is a sure image of His perfection. He has made her desirable. He has conjoined the end and the beginning. He has made her capable of restoring to man that creative slumber in which she was herself conceived. She is the pillar of destiny. She is the gift. She is the possibility of possession . . . She is the point of attachment of the kindly tie that unceasingly unites the Creator with His work. She understands Him. She is the soul which sees and acts. She shares with Him in some way the patience and power of creation.'

In one sense it would seem that woman could not be more highly exalted. But at bottom Claudel does no more than express poetically the Catholic tradition in a slightly modernized form. It has been said that the earthly calling of woman

[1] *La Jeune Fille Violaine.*

is in no way destructive of her supernatural autonomy; but, inversely, in recognizing this, the Catholic feels authorized to maintain in this world the prerogatives of the male. Venerating woman *in God,* men treat her in this world as a servant, even holding that the more one demands complete submission of her, the more surely one will advance her along the road of her salvation. To devote herself to children, husband, home, estate, Country, Church—this is her lot, the lot which the bourgeoisie has always assigned to her. Man gives his activity, woman her person. To sanctify this ranking in the name of the divine will is not at all to modify it, but on the contrary to intend its eternal fixation.

## IV

## BRETON OR POETRY

In spite of the great gulf that separates the religious world of Claudel from the poetic universe of Breton, there is between them an analogy in the role they assign to woman: she is a disturbing factor; she tears man from the sleep of immanence; mouth, key, door, bridge, she is Beatrice leading Dante into the beyond. 'The love of man for woman, if we apply ourselves for a moment to the observation of the world of the senses, continues to crowd the sky with gigantic and tawny flames. It remains the most terrible stumbling-block for the spirit that always feels the need of believing itself in a place of safety.' Love of another leads to the love of the Other. 'It is at the highest point of elective love for a certain being that the floodgates of love for humanity open wide.' But for Breton the beyond is not a far heaven: it is actually here, it is disclosed to such as can push aside the veils of daily banality; eroticism, for one thing, dissipates the allurement of false knowledge. 'In our day the sexual world . . . has not, as far as I know, ceased to oppose its unbreakable core of night to our will to penetrate the universe.' To throw oneself into the mystery is the only way to find out about it. Woman is an enigma and she poses enigmas; her many aspects together form 'the unique being in whom it is vouchsafed us to see the last incarnation of the Sphinx'; and that is why she is revelation. 'You were the very likeness of the

secret,' says Breton to a woman he loves. And a little further on: 'The revelation you brought to me I knew to be a revelation before I even knew in what it might consist.'

This is to say that woman is poetry. And she plays this same role with Gérard de Nerval; but in his Sylvia and Aurelia she has the quality of a memory or of a phantom, because the dream, more true than the real, does not coincide exactly with it. For Breton the coincidence is perfect: there is only one world; poetry is objectively present in things, and woman is unequivocally a being of flesh and blood. One comes across her, not in a half-dream, but wide awake, on a commonplace day that has its date like all the other days in the calendar—April 12th, October 4th, or whatever—in a commonplace setting: a café, some street corner. But she is always distinguished by some unusual trait. Nadja 'walked along with her head held high, quite unlike the other passers-by . . . with curious make-up . . . I had never seen such eyes'. Breton accosts her. 'She smiled, but most mysteriously, and I would say, as if she knew all about the situation.' In his *L'Amour fou*: 'this young woman who had just entered was as if enclosed in a vapour—dressed in fire? . . . and I can declare that in this place, on May 29th, 1934, this woman was *scandalously* beautiful' (Breton's italics). At once the poet realizes that she has a part to play in his destiny. Sometimes this is only a fleeting, secondary role, such as that of the child with Delilah eyes in *Vases communicants;* even here little miracles spring up around her: Breton has a rendezvous with this Delilah and the same day reads a favourable article signed by a friend long lost sight of and named Samson. Sometimes the prodigies multiply; the unknown of May 29th, an undine who was doing a swimming act in a music hall, had been foretold in a pun on the theme *'Ondine, on dîne,'* heard in a restaurant; and her first long evening out with the poet had been minutely described in a poem written by him eleven years before. The most remarkable of these sorceresses is Nadja: she predicts the future, she gives utterance to words and images that her friend has in mind at the same instant; her dreams and her sketches are oracular: 'I am the wandering soul,' she says; she guides her life 'in a peculiar manner, which relies upon pure intuition only and never ceases to partake of the marvellous'; around her what seems objectively to be chance sows a profusion of strange events. She is so wonderfully liberated from regard for appearances that she scorns reason and the laws: she winds up in an

asylum. She was 'a free spirit, somewhat like those spirits of the air with whom certain magical arts permit the formation of a momentary attachment but to whom there could be no question of submission'. So she failed to play fully her feminine role. Clairvoyant, Pythic, inspired, she remains too near the unreal creatures who visited Nerval ; she opens the doors of the supernatural world ; but she is incapable of giving it because she is unable to give herself.

It is in love that woman is fulfilled and is really attained ; special, accepting a special destiny—and not floating rootless through the universe—then she sums up All. The moment when her beauty reaches its highest expression is at that hour of the night when 'she is the perfect mirror in which all that has been, all that has been called upon to be, is bathed adorably in what is going to be *this time*'. For Breton 'to find the place and the formula' is confused with 'to get possession of the truth in a soul and body'. And this possession is possible only in reciprocal love—carnal love, of course. 'The picture of the woman one loves ought to be not only an image at which one smiles, but more, an oracle one questions' ; but it will be an oracle only if the woman herself is something other than an idea or an image ; she should be 'the cornerstone of the material world'. For the seer it is this very world that is Poetry, and in this world it is necessary for him to possess Beatrice in actuality. 'Reciprocal love alone conditions the magnetization on which nothing can take hold, which makes the flesh sunlight and imprints in splendour on the flesh that the spirit is an ever flowing spring, changeless and always alive, the water of which is guided once for all to flow amongst the wild thyme and the marsh marigold.'

This indestructible love could not be other than unique. It is the paradox of Breton's attitude that in his books, from *Vases communicants* to *Arcane 17*, he obstinately avows a unique and eternal love for various women. But he explains that there are social conditions that by denying him free choice lead a man to mistaken choices ; besides, through these errors he is in reality seeking *one* woman. And if he recalls the beloved faces, he 'will likewise discern in all these women's faces only one face: the *last* face he has loved' (Breton's italics). 'How many times, besides, have I been able to realize that under quite dissimilar appearances a most exceptional trait in common sought to define itself from one to another of these faces!' He inquires of the undine in *L'Amour fou*: 'Are you at last that woman, is it only today

that you were to come?' But in *Arcane 17*: 'Well do you know that in seeing you for the first time, I recognized you without a moment's hesitation.' In a perfected, renovated world the couple would be indissoluble, in consequence of a reciprocal and absolute giving: since the well-beloved is everything, how could there be room for another? She is this other, also; and the more fully so, the more she is herself. 'The unusual is inseparable from love. Because you are unique, you can never fail to be for me always another, another you. Through all the diversity of those innumerable flowers yonder, it is you the mutable I love, in chemise of red, naked, in chemise of grey.' And referring to a different but equally unique woman, Breton writes: 'Reciprocal love, as I see it, is an arrangement of mirrors which, from the thousand angles that the unknown can take for me, reflects the true image of her whom I love, ever more astonishing in divination of my own desire and more endued with life.'

This unique woman, at once carnal and artificial, natural and human, casts the same spell as the equivocal objects dear to the surrealists: she is like the spoon-shoe, the table-wolf, the marble-sugar that the poet finds at the flea market or invents in a dream; she shares in the secret of familiar objects suddenly revealed in their true nature, and in the secret of plants and stones. She is all things.[1]

But more especially she is Beauty above and beyond all other things. Beauty for Breton is not a contemplated idea but a reality that is revealed—hence exists—only through passion; there is no beauty in the world except through woman.

'There, deep within the human crucible in that paradoxical region where the fusion of two beings who have really chosen each other restores to all things the values lost from the time of ancient suns, where, however, solitude also rages, through one of those fantasies of nature which around Alaskan craters causes snow to lie under the ashes—that is where years ago I called for search to be made for a new beauty, the beauty envisaged exclusively in passional ends.'

'Convulsive beauty will be erotic, veiled, exploding-fixed, magic-circumstantial, or will not be at all.'

[1] Ma femme à la chevelure de feu de bois
Aux pensées d'éclair de chaleur
A la taille de sablier.
... Ma femme au sexe d'algue et de bonbons anciens
... Ma femme aux yeux de savane.

From woman all that exists derives its meaning: 'It is precisely through love and love alone that the fusion of essence and existence is realized in the highest degree.' It is realized for the lovers and at the same time through the whole world. 'The perpetual re-creation and re-colouring of the world in a single being, as they are achieved by love, send forward a thousand rays to light up the earthly world.' For all poets, almost, woman incarnates nature ; but for Breton she not only expresses nature: she releases it. For nature does not speak a plain language, it is necessary to penetrate nature's secrets to get at her truth, which is the same thing as her beauty: poetry is thus not simply a reflection, but rather a key ; and here woman is not distinguished from poetry. This is why she is the indispensable mediatress without whom all the earth is voiceless: 'She is wont, is nature, to be lighted up and to be darkened, to render me service or dis-service, only in accordance with the rising and the sinking for me of the flames in a hearth which is love, the only love, that of *one* being. In the absence of such love I have known truly vacant skies. It needed only a great rainbow of fire arching from me to lend worth to what exists . . . I contemplate unto dizziness your hands open above the fire of twigs we have just lighted, now burning brightly—your enchanting hands, your transparent hands that hover above the fire of my life.' Each woman he loves is a wonder of nature: 'A small unforgettable fern clinging to the inner wall of a most ancient well.' '. . . Something dazzling and so momentous that she could not but recall to mind . . . the grand physical necessity of nature, while making one more tenderly dream of the nonchalance of certain tall flowers that are just opening.' But inversely: every natural wonder is confounded with the well-beloved ; he is exalting her when with emotion he views a grotto, a flower, a mountain.

But beauty is still something more than beauty. It merges with 'the deep night of consciousness' ; it is truth and eternity, the absolute. Thus the aspect of nature made manifest by woman is not temporal and secondary ; it is rather the necessary essence of nature, an essence not set once for all as Plato imagined, but 'exploding-fixed'. 'I find within myself no other treasure than the key which, since I have known you, opens this limitless meadow for me, through which I shall be led onward until the day of my death . . . For a woman and a man, for ever you and I, shall in their turn glide ever onward to where the path is lost in the oblique

light, at the boundaries of life and its forgetting. . . .'

Thus woman, through the love she inspires and shares, is the only possible salvation for each man. In *Arcane 17* her mission is broadened and made precise: she must save humanity. Breton has always been in the Fourier tradition, which demands the rehabilitation of the flesh and exalts woman as erotic object; it is quite in line for him to reach the Saint-Simonian idea of regeneration through woman. However, 'it is high time for woman's ideas to prevail over man's, whose bankruptcy is clear enough in the tumult of today . . . Yes, it is always the lost woman who sings in man's imagination but who—after what trials for them both!—should be also the woman regained. And first she must regain herself, learn to know herself, through those hells which, without his more than doubtful aid, man's attitude in general sets up around her.'

The role she should fill is before all one of pacification. Breton is astonished that she does not take advantage of her priceless power of appealing to man and extend her arms between those who are struggling together, crying: 'You are brothers.' If today woman appears maladjusted, ill-balanced, it is in consequence of the treatment man's tyranny has inflicted upon her; but she retains a miraculous power because her roots are sunk deep into the living sources of life, the secrets of which the males have lost. 'It is Mélusine whom I invoke, I see no other who can subjugate this savage epoch. I invoke the whole woman, and yet woman such as she is today, woman deprived of her human position, prisoner of her shifting roots, certainly, but also kept by them in providential communication with the elemental forces of nature . . . Woman deprived of her human position, the myth has it thus, through the impatience and the jealousy of man.'

Today, then, we may well espouse the cause of woman; while we await the restoration to her of her true value in life, the time has come 'to declare oneself in art unequivocally against man and for woman'. 'The woman-child. Art should be systematically preparing for her accession to the whole empire of perceptible things.' Why the woman-child? Breton explains it for us: 'I choose the woman-child not to oppose her to the other woman but because it seems to me that in her and only in her is to be found in a state of absolute transparency the *other* prism of vision . . .' (Breton's italics).

To the extent that woman is simply identified as a human being, she will be as unable as male human beings to save

this world in distress; it is femininity as such that introduces into civilization that *other* element which is the truth of life and of poetry and which alone can deliver humanity.

Breton's perspective being exclusively poetic, it is exclusively as poetry, hence as the *other,* that woman is viewed therein. If the question of her own private destiny were raised, the reply would be involved with the ideal of reciprocal love: woman has no vocation other than love; this does not make her inferior, since man's vocation is also love. But one would like to know if for her also love is key to the world and revelation of beauty. Will she find that beauty in her lover, or in her own image? Will she be capable of that poetic action which realizes poetry through a sentient being, or will she limit herself to approving the work of her male? She is poetry in essence, directly—that is to say, for man; we are not told whether she is poetry for herself also. Breton does not speak of woman as subject. No more does he ever evoke the image of the bad woman. In his work in general—in spite of some manifestos and pamphlets in which he reviles the human herd—he strives not to catalogue the superficial rebellings of the world but to reveal its secret truth: woman interests him only because she is a privileged voice. Deeply anchored in nature, very close to earth, she appears also to be the key to the beyond. There is in Breton the same esoteric naturalism as was in the Gnostics who saw in Sophia the principle of the Redemption and even of the creation, as was in Dante choosing Beatrice for his guide and in Petrarch enkindled by the love of Laura. And that is why the being who is most firmly anchored in nature, who is closest to the ground, is also the key to the beyond. Truth, Beauty, Poetry —she is All: once more all under the form of the Other, All except herself.

## V

### STENDHAL OR THE ROMANTIC OF REALITY

If I leave the present epoch and go back now to Stendhal, it is because, in emerging from this carnival atmosphere where Woman is disguised variously as fury, nymph, morn-

ing star, siren, I find it a relief to come upon a man who lives among women of flesh and blood.

Stendhal loved women sensually from childhood; he projected upon them his adolescent aspirations: he liked to fancy himself saving a fair unknown from danger and winning her love. Arriving in Paris, what he wants most ardently is 'a charming woman; we shall adore each other, she will know my soul'. Grown old, he writes in the dust the initials of the women he has loved best. 'I think that reverie has been what I have most enjoyed,' he confides. And images of women are what feed his dreams; their memory gives lively interest to landscapes. 'The line of the cliffs as seen when approaching Arbois, I think, and coming from Dôle by the highway, was for me a tangible and evident image of Métilde's soul.' Music, painting, architecture—everything he prized—he cherished with the feeling of an unhappy lover. If he is strolling in Rome, as each page turns, a woman arises; in the regrets, the desires, the sorrows, the joys they stirred up in him he understood the inclination of his own heart; he would have them as his judges: he frequents their salons, he tries to appear brilliant in their eyes; to them he has owed his greatest joys, his greatest pains, they have been his main occupation; he prefers their love to any friendship, their friendship to that of men. Women inspire his books, feminine figures people them; the fact is that he writes for them in large part. 'I take my chance of being read in 1900 by the souls I love, the Mme Rolands, the Mélanie Guilberts . . .' They were the very substance of his life. How did they come to have that preferment?

This tender friend of women does not believe in the feminine mystery, precisely because he loves them as they really are; no essence defines woman once for all; to him the idea of 'the eternal feminine' seems pedantic and ridiculous. 'Pedants have for two thousand years reiterated the notion that women have a more lively spirit, men more solidity; that women have more delicacy in their ideas and men greater power of attention. A Paris idler who once took a walk in the Versailles Gardens concluded that, judging from all he saw, the trees grow ready trimmed.' The differences to be noted between men and women reflect the difference in their situations. Why, for instance, should women not be more romantic than their lovers? 'A woman occupied in embroidering, dull work that uses only the hands, dreams of her lover; whereas this lover, riding in the open with his

squadron, is put under arrest if he makes a wrong move.' Similarly, women are accused of lacking judgment. 'Women prefer the emotions to reason, and it is quite simple: since according to our stupid customs they are not charged with any family responsibility, *reason is never useful to them* . . . Let your wife run your business affairs with the farmers on two of your pieces of property, and I wager that the accounts will be kept better than if you did it yourself.' If but few feminine geniuses are found in history, it is because society deprives them of all means for expressing themselves. 'All geniuses who are born *women* are lost to the public welfare; once fate gives them means to make themselves known, you will see them achieve the most difficult attainments.'

The worst handicap they have is the besotting education imposed upon them; the oppressor always strives to dwarf the oppressed; man intentionally deprives women of their opportunities. 'We leave idle in women qualities of great brilliance that could be rich in benefit for themselves and for us.' At ten the little girl is quicker and more clever than her brother; at twenty the young fellow is a man of wit and the young girl 'a great awkward idiot, shy and afraid of a spider'; the blame is to be laid on her training. Women should be given just as much instruction as boys. Anti-feminists raise the objection that cultivated and intelligent women are monsters, but the whole trouble is that they are still exceptional; if all of them could have access to culture as naturally as men, they would profit by it as naturally. After they have been thus injured, they are subjected to laws contrary to nature: married against their feelings, they are expected to be faithful, and divorce, if resorted to, is itself held a matter of reproach, like misconduct. A great many women are doomed to idleness, when there is no happiness apart from work. This state of affairs makes Stendhal indignant, and he sees in it the source of all the faults for which women are reproached. They are not angels, nor demons, nor sphinxes: merely human beings reduced to semi-slavery by the imbecile ways of society.

It is precisely because they are oppressed that the best of them avoid the defects that disfigure their oppressors; they are in themselves neither inferior nor superior to man; but by a curious reversal their unhappy situation favours them. It is well known how Stendhal hated serious-mindedness: money, honours, rank, power seemed to him the most melancholy of idols; the vast majority of men sell themselves for

profit; the pedant, the man of consequence, the bourgeois, the husband—all smother within them every spark of life and truth; with ready-made ideas and acquired sentiments and conformable to social routines, their personalities contain nothing but emptiness; a world peopled by these soulless creatures in a desert of ennui. There are many women, unfortunately, who wallow in the same dismal swamps; these are dolls with 'narrow and Parisian ideas,' or often hypocritical devotees. Stendhal experiences 'a mortal disgust for respectable women and their indispensable hypocrisy'; they bring to their frivolous occupations the same seriousness that makes their husbands stiff with affectation; stupid from bad education, envious, vain, gossipy, worthless through idleness, cold, dry, pretentious, malicious, they populate Paris and the provinces; we see them swarming behind the noble figure of a Mme de Rênal, a Mme de Chasteller. The one Stendhal has painted with the most malevolent care is without a doubt Mme Grandet, in whom he has set forth the exact negative of a Mme Roland, a Métilde. Beautiful but expressionless, scornful and without charm, she is formidable in her 'celebrated virtue' but knows not the true modesty that comes from the soul; filled with admiration for herself, puffed up with her own importance, she can only copy the outer semblance of grandeur; fundamentally she is vulgar and base; 'she has no character . . . she bores me,' thinks M. Leuwen. 'Perfectly reasonable, careful for the success of her plans,' her whole ambition is to make her husband a cabinet minister; 'her spirit is arid'; prudent, a conformist, she has always kept away from love, she is incapable of a generous act; when passion breaks out in that dry soul, there is burning but no illumination.

This picture need only be reversed to show clearly what Stendhal asks of women: it is first of all not to permit themselves to be caught in the snares of seriousness; and because of the fact that the things supposed to be of importance are out of their range, women run less risk than men of getting lost in them; they have better chances of preserving that naturalness, that naivety, that generosity which Stendhal puts above all other merit. What he likes in them is what today we call their authenticity: that is the common trait in all the women he loved or lovingly invented; all are free and true beings. Some of them flaunt their freedom most conspicuously: Angela Pietragrua, 'strumpet sublime, in the Italian manner, *à la* Lucretia Borgia,' and Mme Azur, 'strumpet

*à la* Du Barry . . . one of the least vain and frivolous Frenchwomen I have met,' scoff openly at social conventions. Lamiel laughs at customs, mores, laws ; the Sanseverina joins ardently in intrigue and does not hesitate at crime. Others are raised above the vulgar by their vigour of spirit: such is Menta, and another is Mathilde de la Môle, who criticizes, disparages, and scorns the society around her and wants to be distinguished from it. With others, again, liberty assumes a quite negative aspect ; the remarkable thing in Mme de Chasteller is her attitude of detachment from everything secondary ; submissive to the will of her father and even to his opinions, she none the less disputes bourgeois values by the indifference which she is reproached for as childishness and which is the source of her insouciant gaiety. Clélia Conti also is distinguished for her reserve ; balls and other usual amusements of young girls leave her cold ; she always seems distant 'whether through scorn for what is around her, or through regret for some absent chimera' ; she passes judgment on the world, she is indignant at its baseness.

But it is in Mme de Rênal that independence of soul is most deeply hidden ; she is herself unaware that she is not fully resigned to her lot ; it is her extreme delicacy, her lively sensitivity, that show her repugnance for the vulgarity of the people around her ; she is without hypocrisy ; she has preserved a generous heart, capable of violent emotions, and she has a flair for happiness. The heat of this fire which is smouldering within her can hardly be felt from outside, but a breath would be enough to set her all ablaze.

These women are, quite simply, *alive ;* they know that the source of true values is not in external things but in human hearts. This gives its charm to the world they live in: they banish ennui by the simple fact of their presence, with their dreams, their desires, their pleasures, their emotions, their ingenuities. The Sanseverina, that 'active soul', dreads ennui more than death. To stagnate in ennui 'is to keep from dying, she said, not to live' ; she is 'always impassioned over something, always in action, and gay, too'. Thoughtless, childish or profound, gay or grave, daring or secretive, they all reject the heavy sleep in which humanity is mired. And these women who have been able to maintain their liberty —empty as it has been—will rise through passion to heroism once they find an objective worthy of them ; their spiritual power, their energy, suggest the fierce purity of total dedication.

But liberty alone could hardly give them so many romantic attributes: pure liberty gives rise rather to esteem than to emotion; what touches the feelings is the effort to reach liberty through the obstructive forces that beat it down. It is the more moving in women in that the struggle is more difficult. Victory over mere external coercion is enough to delight Stendhal; in his *Chroniques italiennes* he immures his heroines deep within convents, he shuts them up in the palaces of jealous husbands. Thus they have to invent a thousand ruses to rejoin their lovers; secret doors, rope ladders, bloodstained chests, abductions, seclusions, assassinations, outbursts of passion and of disobedience are treated with the most intelligent ingenuity; death and impending tortures add excitement to the audacities of the mad souls he depicts for us. Even in his maturer work Stendhal remains sensitive to this obvious romanticism: it is the outward manifestation of what springs from the heart; they can no more be distinguished from each other than a mouth can be separated from its smile. Clélia invents love anew when she invents the alphabet that enables her to correspond with Fabrice. The Sanseverina is described for us as 'an always sincere soul who never acted with prudence, who abandoned herself wholly to the impression of the moment'; it is when she plots, when she poisons the prince, and when she floods Parma that this soul is revealed to us: she is herself no more than the sublime and mad escapade she has chosen to live. The ladder that Mathilde de la Môle sets against her windowsill is no mere theatrical prop: it is, in tangible form, her proud imprudence, her taste for the extraordinary, her provocative courage. The qualities of these souls would not be displayed were they not surrounded by such inimical powers as prison walls, a ruler's will, a family's severity.

But the most difficult constraints to overcome are those which each person encounters within himself: here the adventure of liberty is most dubious, most poignant, most pungent. Clearly Stendhal's sympathy for his heroines is the greater the more closely they are confined. Certainly, he likes the strumpets, sublime or not, who have trampled upon the conventions once for all; but he cherishes Métilde more tenderly, held back as she is by her scruples and her modesty. Lucien Leuwen enjoys being with that free spirit Mme de Hocquincourt; but he passionately loves the chaste, reserved, and hesitant Mme de Chasteller; he admires the headstrong soul of the Sanseverina, who flinches at nothing;

but he prefers Clélia to her, and it is the young girl who wins Fabrice's heart. And Mme de Rênal, fettered by her pride, her prejudices, and her ignorance, is of all the women created by Stendhal perhaps the one who most astounds him. He frequently places his heroines in a provincial, limited environment, under the control of a husband or an imbecile father ; he is pleased to make them uncultured and even full of false notions. Mme de Rênal and Mme de Chasteller are both obstinately legitimist ; the former is timid and without experience ; the latter has a brilliant intelligence but does not appreciate its value ; thus they are not responsible for their mistakes, but rather they are as much the victims of them as of institutions and the mores ; and it is from error that the romantic blossoms forth, as poetry from frustration.

A clear-headed person who decides upon his acts in full knowledge of the situation is to be curtly approved or blamed ; whereas one admires with fear, pity, irony, love, the courage and the stratagems of a generous heart trying to make its way in the shadows. It is because women are baffled that we see flourishing in them such useless and charming virtues as their modesty, their pride, their extreme delicacy ; in a sense these are faults, for they give rise to deception, oversensitiveness, fits of anger ; but they are sufficiently accounted for by the situation in which women are placed. Women are led to take pride in little things or at least in 'things of merely sentimental value' because all the things 'regarded as important' are out of their reach. Their modesty results from their dependent condition: because they are forbidden to show their capabilities in action, they call in question their very being. It seems to them that the perception of others, especially that of their lover, reveals them truly as they are ; they fear this and try to escape from it. A real regard for value is expressed in their flights, their hesitations, their revolts, and even in their lies ; and this is what makes them worthy of respect ; but it is expressed awkwardly, even in bad faith ; and this is what makes them touching and even mildly comic. It is when liberty is taken in its own snares and cheats against itself that it is most deeply human and therefore to Stendhal most engaging.

Stendhal's women are touching when their hearts set them unforeseen problems: no law, no recipe, no reasoning, no example from without can any longer guide them ; they have to decide for themselves, alone. This forlornness is the high point of freedom. Clélia was brought up in an atmosphere

of liberal ideas, she is lucid and reasonable; but opinions acquired from others, true or false, are of no avail in a moral conflict. Mme de Rênal loves Julien in spite of her morality, and Clélia saves Fabrice against her better judgment: there is in the two cases the same going beyond all recognized values. This hardihood is what arouses Stendhal's enthusiasm; but it is the more moving in that it scarcely dares to avow itself, and on this account it is more natural, more spontaneous, more authentic. In Mme de Rênal audacity is hidden under innocence: not knowing about love, she is unable to recognize it and so yields to it without resistance; it would seem that because of having lived in the dark she is defenceless against the flashing light of passion; she receives it, dazzled, whether it is against heaven and hell or not. When this flame dies down, she falls back into the shadows where husbands and priests are in control. She has no confidence in her own judgment, but whatever is clearly present overwhelms her; as soon as she finds Julien again, she gives him her soul once more. Her remorse and the letter that her confessor wrests from her show to what lengths this ardent and sincere soul had to go in order to escape from the prison where society shut her away and attain to the heaven of happiness.

In Clélia the conflict is more clearly conscious; she hesitates between her loyalty to her father and her amorous pity; she tries to think of arguments. The triumph of the values Stendhal believes in seems to him the more magnificent in that it is regarded as a defeat by the victims of a hypocritical civilization; and he is delighted to see them using trickery and bad faith to make the truth of passion and happiness prevail over the lies they believe in. Thus Clélia is at once laughable and deeply affecting when she promises the Madonna not to *see* Julien any more and then for two years accepts his kisses and embraces on condition that she keep her eyes shut!

With the same tender irony Stendhal considers Mme de Chasteller's hesitancies and Mathilde de la Môle's incoherencies; so many detours, reversals, scruples, hidden victories and defeats in order to arrive at certain simple and legitimate ends! All this is for him the most ravishing of comedies. There is drollery in these dramas because the actress is at once judge and accused, because she is her own dupe, because she imposes roundabout ways upon herself when she need only decree that the Gordian knot be cut. But

nevertheless these inner struggles reveal all the most worthy solicitude that could torture a noble soul: the actress wants to retain her self-respect; she puts her approbation of herself above that of others and thus becomes herself an absolute. These echoless, solitary debates are graver than a cabinet crisis; when Mme de Chasteller asks herself whether she is or is not going to respond to Lucien Leuwen's love, she is making a decision concerning herself and also the world. Can one, she asks, have confidence in others? Can one rely on one's own heart? What is the worth of love and human pledges? Is it foolish or generous to believe and to love?

Such interrogations put in question the very meaning of life, the life of each and of all. The so-called serious man is really futile, because he accepts ready-made justifications for his life; whereas a passionate and profound woman revises established values from moment to moment. She knows the constant tension of unsupported freedom; it puts her in constant danger: she can win or lose all in an instant. It is the anxious assumption of this risk that gives her story the colours of a heroic adventure. And the stakes are the highest there are: the very meaning of existence, this existence which is each one's portion, his only portion. Mina de Vanghel's escapade can in a sense seem absurd; but it involves a whole scheme of ethics. 'Was her life a miscalculation? Her happiness had lasted eight months. Hers was a soul too ardent to be contented with the reality of life.' Mathilde de la Môle is less sincere than Clélia or Mme de Chasteller; she regulates her actions according to the idea of herself which she has built up, not according to the clear actuality of love, of happiness: would it be more haughty and grand to save oneself than to be lost, to humiliate oneself before one's beloved than to resist him? She also is alone in the midst of her doubts, and she is risking that self-respect which means more to her than life. It is the ardent quest for valid reasons for living, the search through the darkness of ignorance, of prejudices, of frauds, in the shifting and feverish light of passion, it is the infinite risk of happiness or death, of grandeur or shame, that gives glory to these women's lives.

Woman is of course unaware of the seductiveness she spreads around her; to contemplate herself, to act the personage, is always an inauthentic attitude; Mme Grandet, comparing herself with Mme Roland, proves by the act that she is not like her. If Mathilde de la Môle remains engaging, it is because she gets herself involved in her comedies and

because she is frequently the prey of her heart just when she thinks she is in control of it; she touches our feelings to the degree that she escapes her own will. But the purest heroines are quite unselfconscious. Mme de Rênal is unaware of her elegance, as Mme de Chasteller is of her intelligence. In this lies one of the deep joys of the lover, with whom both reader and author identify themselves; he is the witness through whom these secret riches come to light; he is alone in admiring the vivacity which Mme de Rênal's glances spread abroad, that 'lively, mercurial, profound spirit' which Mme de Chasteller's entourage fails to appreciate; and even if others appreciate the Sanseverina's mind, he is the one who penetrates farthest into her soul.

Before woman, man tastes the pleasure of contemplation; he is enraptured with her as with a landscape or a painting; she sings in his heart and tints the sky. This revelation reveals him to himself: it is impossible to comprehend the delicacy of women, their sensitiveness, their ardour, without becoming a delicate, sensitive, and ardent soul; feminine sentiments create a world of nuances, of requirements the discovery of which enriches the lover: in the company of Mme de Rênal, Julien becomes a different person from that ambitious man he had resolved to be, he makes a new choice. If a man has only a superficial desire for a woman, he will find it amusing to seduce her. But true love really transfigures his life. 'Love such as Werther's opens the soul . . . to sentiment and to the enjoyment of the *beautiful* under whatever form it presents itself, however ill-clothed. It brings happiness even without wealth . . .' 'It is a new aim in life to which everything is related and which changes the face of everything. Love-passion flings all nature with its sublimities before a man's eyes like a novelty just invented yesterday.' Love breaks the everyday routine, drives ennui away, the ennui in which Stendhal sees such deep evil because it is the lack of any reason for living or dying; the lover has an aim and that is enough to turn each day into an adventure: what a pleasure for Stendhal to spend three days hidden in Menta's cave! Rope ladders, bloodstained caskets, and the like express in his novels this taste for the extraordinary. Love—that is to say, woman—makes apparent the true ends of existence: beauty, happiness, fresh sensations, and a new world. It tears out a man's soul and thereby gives him possession of it; the lover feels the same tension, knows the same risks as his mistress, and proves him-

self more authentically than in his professional career. When Julien hesitates at the foot of a ladder placed by Mathilde, he puts in question his entire destiny ; in that moment his true measure is taken. It is through women, under their influence, in reaction to their behaviour, that Julien, Fabrice, Lucien work out their apprenticeship in dealing with the world and themselves. Test, reward, judge, friend—woman truly is in Stendhal what Hegel was for a moment tempted to make of her: that other consciousness which in reciprocal recognition gives to the other subject the same truth that she receives from him. Two who know each other in love make a happy couple, defying time and the universe ; such a couple is sufficient unto itself, it realizes the absolute.

But all this presupposes that woman is not pure alterity: she is subject in her own right. Stendhal never limits himself to describing his heroines as functions of his heroes: he gives them a destiny of their own. He has attempted a still rare enterprise, one that I believe no novelist has before undertaken: he has projected himself into a female character. He does not hover over Lamiel like Marivaux over Marianne or Richardson over Clarissa Harlowe: he assumes her destiny just as he assumed Julien's. On this account Lamiel's outline remains somewhat speculative, but it is singularly significant. Stendhal has raised all imaginable obstacles about the young girl: she is a poor peasant, ignorant, coarsely raised by people imbued with all the prejudices ; but she clears from her path all moral barriers once she understands the full meaning of the little words: 'that's silly'. Her new freedom of mind allows her in her own fashion to act upon all the impulses of her curiosity, her ambition, her gaiety. Before so stout a heart, material obstacles could not but be smoothed away, and her only problem will be to shape a destiny worthy of her in a mediocre world. She must find fulfilment in crime and death ; but this is also Julien's lot. There is no place for great souls in society as it exists. And men and woman are in the same boat.

It is noteworthy that Stendhal should be at once so deeply romantic and so decidedly feministic ; usually feminists are rational minds who in all matters take a universal point of view ; but Stendhal demands woman's emancipation not only in the name of liberty in general but also in the name of individual happiness. Love, he believes, will have nothing to lose ; on the contrary, it will be the more true as woman, be-

ing man's equal, is able to understand him the more completely. No doubt certain qualities admired in woman will disappear ; but their worth comes from the freedom they express. This will be manifested under other forms, and the romantic will not vanish from the world. Two separate beings, in different circumstances, face to face in freedom and seeking justification of their existence through one another, will always live an adventure full of risk and promise. To depart from it means a living death ; but where it shines forth, there shine forth also beauty, happiness, love, and a joy that carries its own justification. That is why he rejects the mystifications of the serious, as he rejects the false poetry of the myths. Human reality suffices him. Woman according to him is simply a human being: nor could any shape of dreams be more enrapturing.

## VI

## SUMMARY

It is to be seen from these examples that each separate writer reflects the great collective myths: we have seen woman as *flesh* ; the flesh of the male is produced in the mother's body and re-created in the embraces of the woman in love. Thus woman is related to *nature,* she incarnates it: vale of blood, open rose, siren, the curve of a hill, she represents to man the fertile soil, the sap, the material beauty and the soul of the world. She can hold the keys to *poetry* ; she can be *mediatrix* between this world and the beyond: grace or oracle, star or sorceress, she opens the door to the supernatural, the surreal. She is doomed to *immanence* ; and through her passivity she bestows peace and harmony—but if she declines this role, she is seen forthwith as a praying mantis, an ogress. In any case she appears as the *privileged Other*, through whom the subject fulfils himself: one of the measures of man, his counterbalance, his salvation, his adventure, his happiness.

But these myths are very differently orchestrated by our authors. The *Other* is particularly defined according to the particular manner in which the *One* chooses to set himself up. Every man asserts his freedom and transcendence—but

they do not all give these words the same sense. For Montherlant transcendence is a situation: he is the translucent, he soars in the sky of heroes; woman crouches on earth, beneath his feet; it amuses him to measure the distance that separates him from her; from time to time he raises her up to him, takes her, and then throws her back; never does he lower himself down to her realm of slimy shadows. Lawrence places transcendence in the phallus; the phallus is life and power only by grace of woman; immanence is therefore good and necessary; the false hero who pretends to be above setting foot on earth, far from being a demigod, fails to attain man's estate. Woman is not to be scorned, she is deep richness, a warm spring; but she should give up all personal transcendence and confine herself to furthering that of her male. Claudel asks her for the same devotion: for him, too, woman should maintain life while man extends its range through his activities; but for the Catholic all earthly affairs are immersed in vain immanence: the only transcendent is God; in the eyes of God the man in action and the woman who serves him are exactly equal; it is for each to surpass his or her earthly state: salvation is in all cases an autonomous enterprise. For Breton the rank of the sexes is reversed; action and conscious thought, in which the male finds his transcendence, seem to Breton to constitute a silly mystification that gives rise to war, stupidity, bureaucracy, the negation of anything human; it is immanence, the pure, dark presence of the real, which is truth; true transcendence would be accomplished by a return to immanence. His attitude is the exact opposite of Montherlant's: the latter likes war because in war one gets rid of women, Breton venerates woman because she brings peace. Montherlant confuses mind and subjectivity—he refuses to accept the given universe; Breton thinks that mind is objectively present at the heart of the world; woman endangers Montherlant because she breaks his solitude; she is revelation for Breton because she tears him out of his subjectivity. As for Stendhal, we have seen that for him woman hardly has a mystical value: he regards her as being, like man, a transcendent; for this humanist, free beings of both sexes fulfil themselves in their reciprocal relations; and for him it is enough if the *Other* be simply an other so that life may have what he calls 'a pungent saltiness'. He is not seeking a 'stellar equilibrium', he is not fed on the bread of disgust; he is not looking for a miracle; he does not wish to be con-

cerned with the cosmos or with poetry, but with free human beings.

More, Stendhal feels that he is himself a clear, free being. The others—and this is a most important point—pose as transcendents but feel themselves prisoners of a dark presence in their own hearts: they project this 'unbreakable core of night' upon woman. Montherlant has an Adlerian complex, giving rise to his thick-witted bad faith: it is this tangle of pretensions and fears that he incarnates in woman; his disgust for her is what he dreads feeling for himself. He would trample underfoot, in woman, the always possible proof of his own insufficiency; he appeals to scorn to save him; and woman is the trench into which he throws all the monsters that haunt him.[1] The life of Lawrence shows us that he suffered from an analogous though more purely sexual complex: in his works woman serves as a compensation myth, exalting a virility that the writer was none too sure of; when he describes Kate at Don Cipriano's feet, he feels as if he had won a male triumph over his wife, Frieda; nor does he permit his companion to raise any questions: if she were to oppose his aims he would doubtless lose confidence in them; her role is to reassure him. He asks of her peace, repose, faith, as Montherlant asks for certainty regarding his superiority: they demand what is missing in them. Claudel's lack is not that of self-confidence: if he is timid it is only in secret with God. Nor is there any trace of the battle of the sexes in his work. Man boldly takes to himself the burden of woman; she is a possibility for temptation or for salvation. It would seem that for Breton man is true only through the mystery that is within him; it pleases him for Nadja to see that star towards which he moves and which is like 'the heart of a heartless flower'. In his dreams, his presentiments, the spontaneous flow of his stream of consciousness—in such activities, which escape the control of the will and the reason, he recognizes his true self; woman is the visible image of that veiled presence which is infinitely more essential than his conscious personality.

Stendhal is in tranquil agreement with himself; but he needs woman as she needs him in order to gather his diffuse existence into the unity of a single design and destiny: it is as

[1] Stendhal has passed judgment in advance upon the cruelties with which Montherlant amuses himself: 'What to do when indifferent? Love lightly, but without the horrors. The horrors always come from a small soul who needs reassurance regarding his own merits.'

though man reaches manhood for another; but still he needs to have the lending of the other's consciousness. Other males are too indifferent towards their fellows; only the loving woman opens her heart to her lover and shelters him there, wholly. Except for Claudel, who finds in God his preferred witness, all the writers we have considered expect that woman will cherish in them what Malraux calls 'this incomparable monster' known to themselves only. In co-operation or contest men face each other as generalized types. Montherlant is for his fellows a writer, Lawrence a doctrinaire, Breton a school principal, Stendhal a diplomat or man of wit; it is woman who reveals in one a magnificent and cruel prince, in another a disquieting faun, in this one a god or a sun or a being 'black and cold as a man struck by lightning at the feet of the Sphinx,'[1] in the last a seducer, a charmer, a lover.

For each of them the ideal woman will be she who incarnates most exactly the *Other* capable of revealing him to himself. Montherlant, the solar spirit, seeks pure animality in her; Lawrence, the phallicist, asks her to sum up the feminine sex in general; Claudel defines her as a soul-sister; Breton cherishes Mélusine, rooted in nature, pinning his hope on the woman-child; Stendhal wants his mistress intelligent, cultivated, free in spirit and behaviour: an equal. But the sole earthly destiny reserved for the equal, the woman-child, the soul-sister, the woman-sex, the woman-animal is always man! Whatever ego may seek himself through her, he can find himself only if she is willing to act as his crucible. She is required in every case to forget self and to love. Montherlant consents to have pity upon the woman who allows him to measure his virile potency; Lawrence addresses a burning hymn to the woman who gives up being herself for his sake; Claudel exalts the handmaid, the female servant, the devotee who submits to God in submitting to the male; Breton is in hopes of human salvation from woman because she is capable of total love for her child or her lover, and even in Stendhal the heroines are more moving than the masculine heroes because they give themselves to their passion with a more distraught violence; they help man fulfil his destiny, as Prouhèze contributes to the salvation of Rodrigue; in Stendhal's novels it often happens that they save their lovers from ruin, prison, or death. Feminine devotion is demanded as a duty by Montherlant and Lawrence; less

[1] BRETON'S *Nadja*.

arrogant, Claudel, Breton, and Stendhal admire it as a generous free choice; they wish for it without claiming to deserve it; but—except for the astounding Lamiel—all their works show that they expect from woman that altruism which Comte admired in her and imposed upon her, and which according to him constituted a mark at once of flagrant inferiority and of an equivocal superiority.

We could multiply examples, but they would invariably lead us to the same conclusions. When he describes woman, the writer discloses his general ethics and the special idea he has of himself; and in her he often betrays also the gap between his world view and his egotistical dreams. The absence or insignificance of the feminine element throughout the work of an author is in its own way symptomatic; but that element is extremely important when it sums up in its totality all the aspects of the Other, as happens with Lawrence. It remains important when woman is viewed simply as an other but the writer is interested in the individual adventure of her life, as with Stendhal; it loses importance in an epoch such as ours when personal problems of the individual are of secondary interest. Woman, however, as the other still plays a role to the extent that, if only to transcend himself, each man still needs to learn more fully what he is.

CHAPTER III

# MYTH AND REALITY

THE myth of woman plays a considerable part in literature ; but what is its importance in daily life? To what does it affect the customs and conduct of individuals? In replying to this question it will be necessary to state precisely the relations this myth bears to reality.

There are different kinds of myths. This one, the myth of woman, sublimating an immutable aspect of the human condition—namely, the 'division' of humanity into two classes of individuals—is a static myth. It projects into the realm of Platonic ideas a reality that is directly experienced or is conceptualized on a basis of experience ; in place of fact, value, significance, knowledge, empirical law, it substitutes a transcendental Idea, timeless, unchangeable, necessary. This idea is indisputable because it is beyond the given: it is endowed with absolute truth. Thus, as against the dispersed, contingent, and multiple existences of actual women, mythical thought opposes the Eternal Feminine, unique and changeless. If the definition provided for this concept is contradicted by the behaviour of flesh-and-blood women, it is the latter who are wrong: we are told not that Femininity is a false entity, but that the women concerned are not feminine. The contrary facts of experience are impotent against the myth. In a way, however, its source is in experience. Thus it is quite true that woman is other than man, and this alterity is directly felt in desire, the embrace, love ; but the real relation is one of reciprocity ; as such it gives rise to authentic drama. Through eroticism, love, friendship, and their alternatives, deception, hate, rivalry, the relation is a struggle between conscious beings each of whom wishes to be essential, it is the mutual recognition of free beings who confirm one another's freedom, it is the vague transition from aversion to participation. To pose Woman is to pose the absolute

Other, without reciprocity, denying against all experience that she is a subject, a fellow human being.

In actuality, of course, women appear under various aspects; but each of the myths built up around the subject of woman is intended to sum her up *in toto*; each aspires to be unique. In consequence, a number of incompatible myths exist, and men tarry musing before the strange incoherencies manifested by the idea of Femininity. As every woman has a share in a majority of these archetypes—each of which lays claim to containing the sole Truth of woman—men of today also are moved again in the presence of their female companions to an astonishment like that of the old sophists who failed to understand how man could be blond and dark at the same time! Transition towards the absolute was indicated long ago in social phenomena: relations are easily congealed in classes, functions in types, just as relations, to the childish mentality, are fixed in things. Patriarchal society, for example, being centred upon the conservation of the patrimony, implies necessarily, along with those who own and transmit wealth, the existence of men and women who take property away from its owners and put it into circulation. The men—adventurers, swindlers, thieves, speculators—are generally repudiated by the group; the women, employing their erotic attraction, can induce young men and even fathers of families to scatter their patrimonies, without ceasing to be within the law. Some of these women appropriate their victims' fortunes or obtain legacies by using undue influence; this role being regarded as evil, those who play it are called 'bad women'. But the fact is that quite to the contrary they are able to appear in some other setting—at home with their fathers, brothers, husbands, or lovers—as guardian angels; and the courtesan who 'plucks' rich financiers is, for painters and writers, a generous patroness. It is easy to understand in actual experience the ambiguous personality of Aspasia or Mme de Pompadour. But if woman is depicted as the Praying Mantis, the Mandrake, the Demon, then it is most confusing to find in woman also the Muse, the Goddess Mother, Beatrice.

As group symbols and social types are generally defined by means of antonyms in pairs, ambivalence will seem to be an intrinsic quality of the Eternal Feminine. The saintly mother has for correlative the cruel stepmother, the angelic young girl has the perverse virgin: thus it will be said sometimes that Mother equals Life, sometimes that Mother equals

Death, that every virgin is pure spirit or flesh dedicated to the devil.

Evidently it is not reality that dictates to society or to individuals their choice between the two opposed basic categories; in every period, in each case, society and the individual decide in accordance with their needs. Very often they project into the myth adopted the institutions and values to which they adhere. Thus the paternalism that claims woman for hearth and home defines her as sentiment, inwardness, immanence. In fact every existent is at once immanence and transcendence; when one offers the existent no aim, or prevents him from attaining any, or robs him of his victory, then his transcendence falls vainly into the past—that is to say, falls back into immanence. This is the lot assigned to woman in the patriarchate; but it is in no way a vocation, any more than slavery is the vocation of the slave. The development of this mythology is to be clearly seen in Auguste Comte. To identify Woman with Altruism is to guarantee to man absolute rights in her devotion, it is to impose on women a categorical imperative.

The myth must not be confused with the recognition of significance; significance is immanent in the object; it is revealed to the mind through a living experience; whereas the myth is a transcendent Idea that escapes the mental grasp entirely. When in *L'Age d'homme* Michel Leiris describes his vision of the feminine organs, he tells us things of significance and elaborates no myth. Wonder at the feminine body, dislike for menstrual blood, come from perceptions of a concrete reality. There is nothing mythical in the experience that reveals the voluptuous qualities of feminine flesh, and it is not an excursion into myth if one attempts to describe them through comparisons with flowers or pebbles. But to say that Woman is Flesh, to say that the Flesh is Night and Death, or that it is the splendour of the Cosmos, is to abandon terrestrial truth and soar into an empty sky. For man also is flesh for woman; and woman is not merely a carnal object; and the flesh is clothed in special significance for each person and in each experience. And likewise it is quite true that woman—like man—is a being rooted in nature; she is more enslaved to the species than is the male, her animality is more manifest; but in her as in him the given traits are taken on through the fact of existence, she belongs also to the human realm. To assimilate her to Nature is simply to act from prejudice.

Few myths have been more advantageous to the ruling caste than the myth of woman: it justifies all privileges and even authorizes their abuse. Men need not bother themselves with alleviating the pains and the burdens that physiologically are women's lot, since these are 'intended by Nature'; men use them as a pretext for increasing the misery of the feminine lot still further, for instance by refusing to grant to woman any right to sexual pleasure, by making her work like a beast of burden.[1]

Of all these myths, none is more firmly anchored in masculine hearts than that of the feminine 'mystery'. It has numerous advantages. And first of all it permits an easy explanation of all that appears inexplicable; the man who 'does not understand' a woman is happy to substitute an objective resistance for a subjective deficiency of mind; instead of admitting his ignorance, he perceives the presence of a 'mystery' outside himself: an alibi, indeed, that flatters laziness and vanity at once. A heart smitten with love thus avoids many disappointments: if the loved one's behaviour is capricious, her remarks stupid, then the mystery serves to excuse it all. And finally, thanks again to the mystery, that negative relation is perpetuated which seemed to Kierkegaard infinitely preferable to positive possession; in the company of a living enigma man remains alone—alone with his dreams, his hopes, his fears, his love, his vanity. This subjective game, which can go all the way from vice to mystical ecstasy, is for many a more attractive experience than an authentic relation with a human being. What foundations exist for such a profitable illusion?

Surely woman is, in a sense, mysterious, 'mysterious as is all the world', according to Maeterlinck. Each is *subject* only for himself; each can grasp in immanence only himself, alone: from this point of view the *other* is always a mystery. To men's eyes the opacity of the self-knowing self, of the *pour-soi*, is denser in the *other* who is feminine; men are unable to penetrate her special experience through any working of sympathy: they are condemned to ignorance of the quality of woman's erotic pleasure, the discomfort of menstruation,

[1] Cf. BALZAC: *Physiology of Marriage*: 'Pay no attention to her murmurs, her cries, her pains; *nature has made her for our use* and for bearing everything: children, sorrows, blows and pains inflicted by man. Do not accuse yourself of hardness. In all the codes of so-called civilized nations, man has written the laws that ranged woman's destiny under this bloody epigraph: *"Vae victis!* Woe to the weak!"'

and the pains of childbirth. The truth is that there is mystery on both sides: as the *other* who is masculine sex, every man, also, has within him a presence, an inner self impenetrable to woman; she in turn is in ignorance of the male's erotic feeling. But in accordance with the universal rule I have stated, the categories in which men think of the world are established *from their point of view, as absolute*: they misconceive reciprocity, here as everywhere. A mystery for man, woman is considered to be mysterious in essence.

Her situation makes woman very liable to such a view. Her physiological nature is very complex: she herself submits to it as to some rigmarole from outside; her body does not seem to her to be a clear expression of herself; within it she feels herself a stranger. Indeed, the bond that in every individual connects the physiological life and the psychic life —or better the relation existing between the contingence of an individual and the free spirit that assumes it—is the deepest enigma implied in the condition of being human, and this enigma is presented in its most disturbing form in woman.

But what is commonly referred to as the mystery is not the subjective solitude of the conscious self, nor the secret organic life. It is on the level of communication that the word has its true meaning: it is not a reduction to pure silence, to darkness, to absence; it implies a stammering presence that fails to make itself manifest and clear. To say that woman is mystery is to say, not that she is silent, but that her language is not understood; she is there, but hidden behind veils; she exists beyond these uncertain appearances. What is she? Angel, demon, one inspired, an actress? It may be supposed either that there are answers to these questions which are impossible to discover, or, rather, that no answer is adequate because a fundamental ambiguity marks the feminine being: and perhaps in her heart she is even for herself quite indefinable: a sphinx.

The fact is that she would be embarrassed to decide *what* she *is*; but this is not because the hidden truth is too vague to be discerned: it is because in this domain there is no truth. An existent *is* nothing other than what he does; the possible does not extend beyond the real, essence does not precede existence: in pure subjectivity, the human being *is not anything*. He is to be measured by his acts. Of a peasant woman one can say that she is a good or a bad worker, of an actress that she has or does not have talent; but if one considers a woman in her immanent presence, her inward self, one can

say absolutely nothing about her, she falls short of having any qualifications. Now, in amorous or conjugal relations, in all relations where the woman is the vassal, the other, she is being dealt with in her immanence. It is noteworthy that the feminine comrade, colleague, and associate are without mystery; on the other hand, if the vassal is male, if, in the eyes of a man or a woman who is older, or richer, a young man, for example, plays the role of the inessential object, then he too becomes shrouded in mystery. And this uncovers for us a substructure under the feminine mystery which is economic in nature.

A sentiment cannot be supposed to *be* anything. 'In the domain of sentiments,' writes Gide, 'the real is not distinguished from the imaginary. And if to imagine one loves is enough to be in love, then also to tell oneself that one imagines oneself to be in love when one is in love is enough to make one forthwith love a little less.' Discrimination between the imaginary and the real can be made only through behaviour. Since man occupies a privileged position in this world, he is able to show his love actively; very often he supports the woman or at least helps her financially; in marrying her he gives her social standing; he makes her presents; his economic and social independence allows him to take the initiative: it was M. de Norpois who, when separated from Mme de Villeparisis, made twenty-four-hour journeys to visit her. Very often the man is busy, the woman idle: he *gives* her the time he passes with her; she takes it: is it with pleasure, passionately, or only for amusement? Does she accept these benefits through love or through self-interest? Does she love her husband or her marriage? Of course, even the man's evidence is ambiguous: is such and such a gift granted through love or out of pity? But while normally a woman finds numerous advantages in her relations with a man, his relations with a woman are profitable to a man only in so far as he loves her. And so one can almost judge the degree of his affection by the total picture of his attitude.

But a woman hardly has means for sounding her own heart; according to her moods she will view her own sentiments in different lights, and as she submits to them passively, one interpretation will be no truer than another. In those rare instances in which she holds the position of economic and social privilege, the mystery is reversed, showing that it does not pertain to *one sex* rather than the other, but to the situation. For a great many women the roads to transcen-

dence are blocked: because they *do* nothing, they fail to *make themselves* anything. They wonder indefinitely what they *could have* become, which sets them to asking about what they *are*. It is a vain question. If man fails to discover that secret essence of femininity, it is simply because it does not exist. Kept on the fringe of the world, woman cannot be objectively defined through this world, and her mystery conceals nothing but emptiness.

Furthermore, like all the oppressed, woman deliberately dissembles her objective actuality ; the slave, the servant, the indigent, all who depend upon the caprices of a master, have learned to turn towards him a changeless smile or an enigmatic impassivity ; their real sentiments, their actual behaviour, are carefully hidden. And moreover woman is taught from adolescence to lie to men, to scheme, to be wily. In speaking to them she wears an artificial expression on her face ; she is cautious, hypocritical, play-acting.

But the Feminine Mystery as recognized in mythical thought is a more profound matter. In fact, it is immediately implied in the mythology of the absolute Other. If it be admitted that the inessential conscious being, too, is a clear subjectivity, capable of performing the *Cogito*, then it is also admitted that this being is in truth sovereign and returns to being essential ; in order that all reciprocity may appear quite impossible, it is necessary for the Other to be for itself an other, for its very subjectivity to be affected by its otherness ; this consciousness which would be alienated as a consciousness, in its pure immanent presence, would evidently be Mystery. It would be Mystery in itself from the fact that it would be Mystery for itself ; it would be absolute Mystery.

In the same way it is true that, beyond the secrecy created by their dissembling, there is mystery in the Black, the Yellow, in so far as they are considered absolutely as the inessential Other. It should be noted that the American citizen, who profoundly baffles the average European, is not, however, considered as being 'mysterious': one states more modestly that one does not understand him. And similarly woman does not always 'understand' man ; but there is no such thing as a masculine mystery. The point is that rich America, and the male, are on the Master side and that Mystery belongs to the slave.

To be sure, we can only muse in the twilight byways of bad faith upon the positive reality of the Mystery ; like cer-

tain marginal hallucinations, it dissolves under the attempt to view it fixedly. Literature always fails in attempting to portray 'mysterious' women ; they appear only at the beginning of a novel as strange, enigmatic figures ; but unless the story remains unfinished they give up their secret in the end and they are then simply consistent and transparent persons. The heroes in Peter Cheyney's books, for example, never cease to be astonished at the unpredictable caprices of women: no one can ever guess how they will act, they upset all calculations. The fact is that once the springs of their action are revealed to the reader, they are seen to be very simple mechanisms: this woman was a spy, that one a thief ; however clever the plot, there is always a key ; and it could not be otherwise, had the author all the talent and imagination in the world. Mystery is never more than a mirage that vanishes as we draw near to look at it.

We can see now that the myth is in large part explained by its usefulness to man. The myth of woman is a luxury. It can appear only if man escapes from the urgent demands of his needs ; the more relationships are concretely lived, the less they are idealized. The fellah of ancient Egypt, the Bedouin peasant, the artisan of the Middle Ages, the worker of today has in the requirements of work and poverty relations with his particular woman companion which are too definite for her to be embellished with an aura either auspicious or inauspicious. The epochs and the social classes that have been marked by the leisure to dream have been the ones to set up the images, black and white, of femininity. But along with luxury there was utility ; these dreams were irresistibly guided by interests. Surely most of the myths had roots in the spontaneous attitude of man towards his own existence and towards the world around him. But going beyond experience towards the transcendent Idea was deliberately used by patriarchal society for purposes of self-justification ; through the myths this society imposed its laws and customs upon individuals in a picturesque, effective manner ; it is under a mythical form that the group-imperative is indoctrinated into each conscience. Through such intermediaries as religions, traditions, language, tales, songs, movies, the myths penetrate even into such existences as are most harshly enslaved to material realities. Here everyone can find sublimation of his drab experiences: deceived by the woman he loves, one declares that she is a Crazy Womb ; another, obsessed by his impotence, calls her a Praying

Mantis; still another enjoys his wife's company: behold, she is Harmony, Rest, the Good Earth! The taste for eternity at a bargain, for a pocket-sized absolute, which is shared by a majority of men, is satisfied by myths. The smallest emotion, a slight annoyance, becomes the reflection of a timeless Idea —an illusion agreeably flattering to the vanity.

The myth is one of those snares of false objectivity into which the man who depends on ready-made valuations rushes headlong. Here again we have to do with the substitution of a set idol for actual experience and the free judgments it requires. For an authentic relation with an autonomous existent, the myth of Woman substitutes the fixed contemplation of a mirage. 'Mirage! Mirage!' cries Laforgue. 'We should kill them since we cannot comprehend them; or better tranquillize them, instruct them, make them give up their taste for jewels, make them our genuinely equal comrades, our intimate friends, real associates here below, dress them differently, cut their hair short, say anything and everything to them.' Man would have nothing to lose, quite the contrary, if he gave up disguising woman as a symbol. When dreams are official community affairs, clichés, they are poor and monotonous indeed beside the living reality; for the true dreamer, for the poet, woman is a more generous fount than is any down-at-heel marvel. The times that have most sincerely treasured women are not the period of feudal chivalry nor yet the gallant nineteenth century. They are the times—like the eighteenth century—when men have regarded women as fellow creatures; then it is that women seem truly romantic, as the reading of *Liaisons dangereuses, Le Rouge et le noir, Farewell to Arms,* is sufficient to show. The heroines of Laclos, Stendhal, Hemingway are without mystery, and they are not the less engaging for that. To recognize in woman a human being is not to impoverish man's experience: this would lose none of its diversity, its richness, or its intensity if it were to occur between two subjectivities. To discard the myths is not to destroy all dramatic relation between the sexes, it is not to deny the significance authentically revealed to man through feminine reality; it is not to do away with poetry, love, adventure, happiness, dreaming. It is simply to ask that behaviour, sentiment, passion be founded upon the truth.[1]

[1] Laforgue goes on to say regarding woman: 'Since she has been left in slavery, idleness, without occupation or weapon other than her sex, she has over-developed this aspect and has become

'Woman is lost. Where are the women? The women of today are not women at all!' We have seen what these mysterious phrases mean. In men's eyes—and for the legion of women who see through men's eyes—it is not enough to have a woman's body nor to assume the female function as mistress or mother in order to be a 'true woman'. In sexuality and maternity woman as subject can claim autonomy; but to be a 'true woman' she must accept herself as the Other. The men of today show a certain duplicity of attitude which is painfully lacerating to women; they are willing on the whole to accept woman as a fellow being, an equal; but they still require her to remain the inessential. For her these two destinies are incompatible; she hesitates between one and the other without being exactly adapted to either, and from this comes her lack of equilibrium. With man there is no break between public and private life: the more he confirms his grasp on the world in action and in work, the more virile he seems to be; human and vital values are combined in him. Whereas woman's independent successes are in contradiction with her femininity, since the 'true woman' is required to make herself object, to be the Other.

It is quite possible that in this matter man's sensibility and sexuality are being modified. A new aesthetics has already been born. If the fashion of flat chests and narrow hips—the boyish form—has had its brief season, at least the over-opulent ideal of past centuries has not returned. The feminine body is asked to be flesh, but with discretion; it is to be slender and not loaded with fat; muscular, supple, strong, it is bound to suggest transcendence; it must not be pale like a too shaded hothouse plant, but preferably tanned like a workman's torso from being bared to the sun. Woman's dress in becoming practical need not make her appear sexless: on the contrary, short skirts made the most of legs and thighs as never before. There is no reason why working should take away woman's sex appeal. It may be disturbing to contemplate woman as at once a social personage and carnal prey. For a woman to hold some 'man's position' and be desirable at the same time has long been a subject for more or less ribald joking; but gradually the impropriety and the irony have become blunted, and it

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the Feminine... We have permitted this hypertrophy; she is here in the world for our benefit... Well! that is all wrong... Up to now we have played with woman as if she were a doll. This has lasted altogether too long!...'

would seem that a new form of eroticism is coming into being—perhaps it will give rise to new myths.

What is certain is that today it is very difficult for women to accept at the same time that status as autonomous individuals and their womanly destiny; this is the source of the blundering and restlessness which sometimes cause them to be considered a 'lost sex'. And no doubt it is more comfortable to submit to a blind enslavement than to work for liberation: the dead, for that matter, are better adapted to the earth than are the living. In all respects a return to the past is no more possible than it is desirable. What must be hoped for is that the men for their part will unreservedly accept the situation that is coming into existence; only then will women be able to live in that situation without anguish. Then Laforgue's prayer will be answered: 'Ah, young women, when will you be our brothers, our brothers in intimacy without ulterior thought of exploitation? When shall we clasp hands truly?' Then Breton's 'Mélusine, no longer under the weight of the calamity let loose upon her by man alone, Mélusine set free . . .' will regain 'her place in humanity'. Then she will be a full human being, 'when', to quote a letter of Rimbaud, 'the infinite bondage of woman is broken, when she will live in and for herself, man—hitherto detestable—having let her go free'.

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